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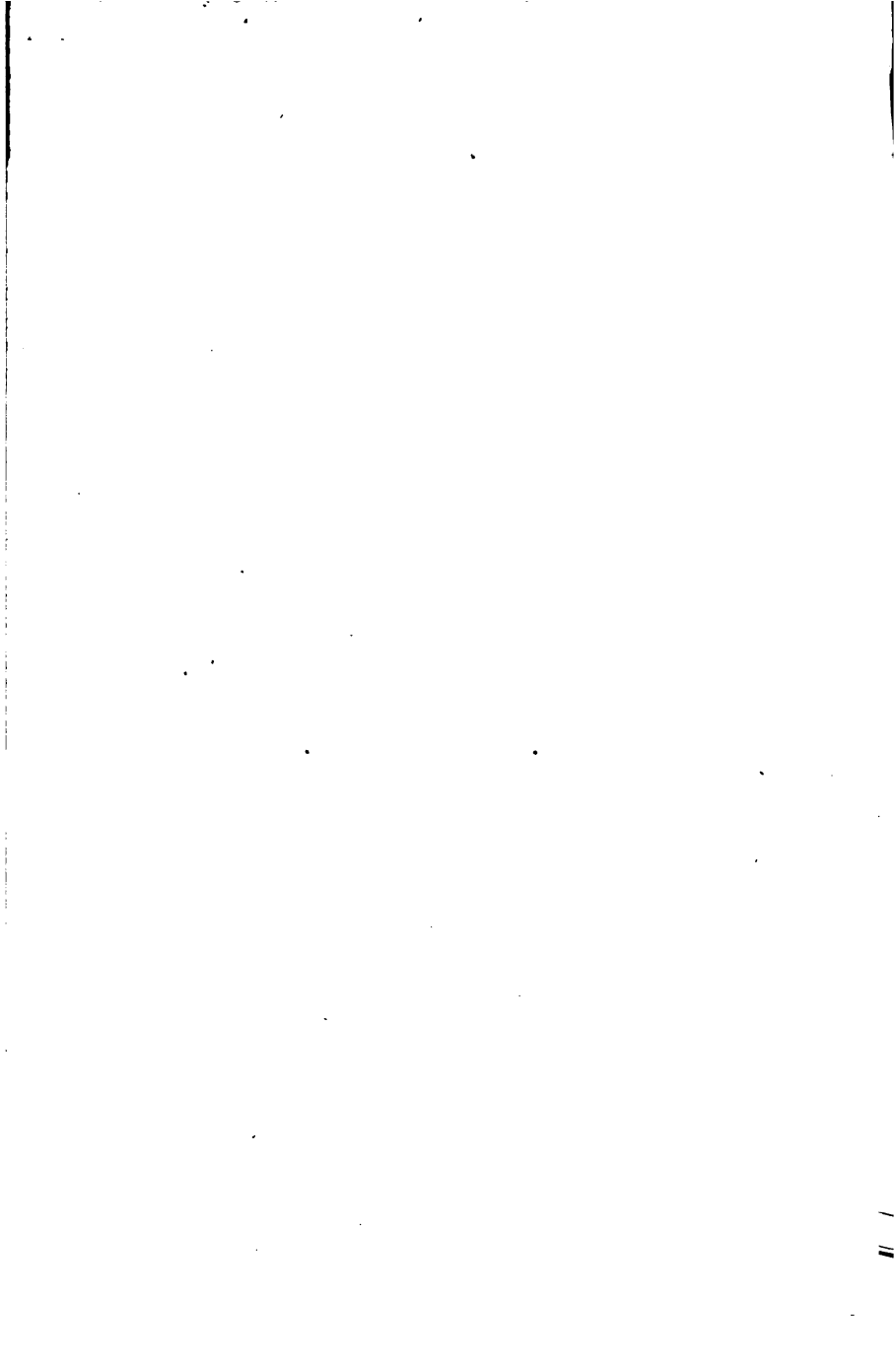


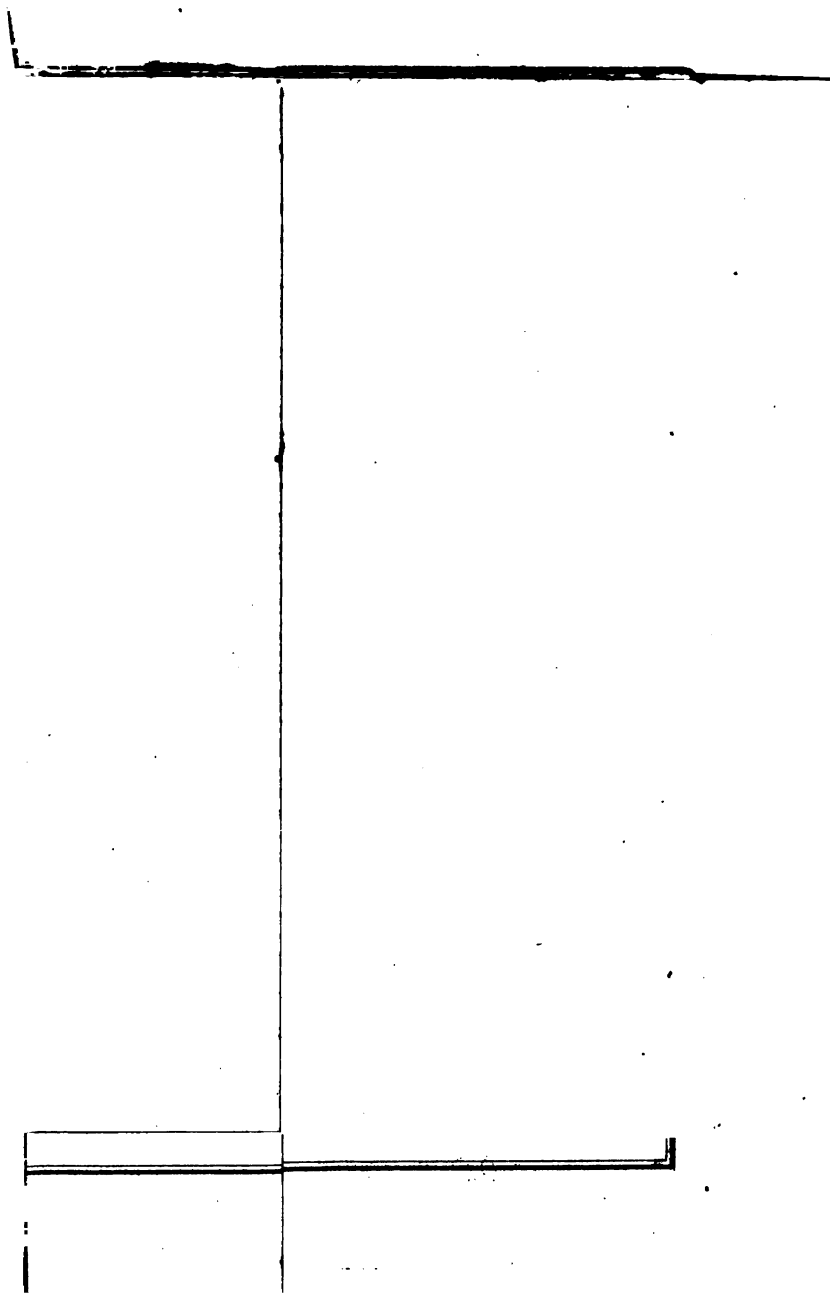
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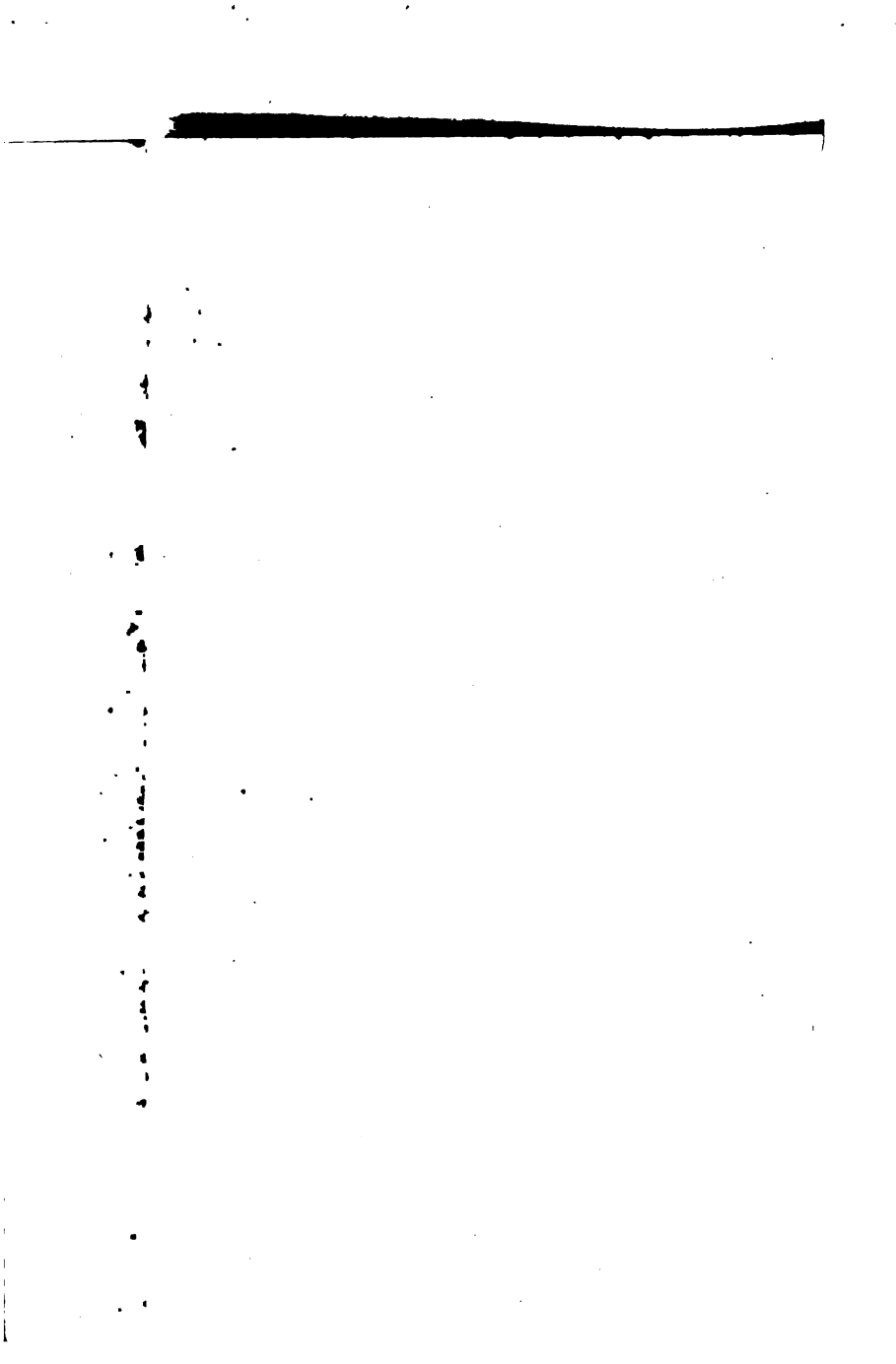
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THE BIBLE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE.

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VOL. III.

FROM DAVID TO JOSIAH.

PREPARED BY DR. H. OORT.

Authorised Translation.



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*** The author has availed himself of the issue of this volume of the translation of his work to introduce considerable modifications into several of the chapters.*

BOOK III.

FROM DAVID TO JOSIAH.

CHAPTER I.

JERUSALEM THE CITY OF THE KING AND OF YAHWEH.

2 SAMUEL V. 17-25, 6-9, VI., VII.¹

19 **A**FTER all the dangers and vicissitudes of his lot, David was summoned at last by the sons of Israel to be their king. Yet it by no means followed that he could sit down in undisputed power and rest upon his laurels. It is easy to guess the quarter from which the storm would burst upon him. The Philistines saw with vexation how the old divisions between the Israelitish tribes were healed, and how they all combined to make David king. They had good reason to fear that, under such a valiant leader, their neighbours might soon grow too strong for them ; so they brought their army into the field at once in hopes of preventing it. When attacking Saul they had marched into the heart of the territory of Benjamin, but David's head-quarters were at Hebron, so now they turned southwards by one of the valleys that intersect the mountains of Judah, and reached the plain of the Rephaites near Jebus. David had no forces worthy of the name, with which to oppose them. The writer of the book of Chronicles² speaks of great hosts of warriors coming from all the tribes to do homage to David at Hebron—he brings a hundred and twenty thousand from the district beyond Jordan alone—but this enormous army only existed in his

¹ 1 Chronicles xi.—xvii.

² 1 Chronicles xii. 24-40.

own imagination. It is true that warlike representatives of every tribe now followed David's flag and had put their swords at his service, true that their influence was a sufficient guarantee that he would be received with open arms in any, or almost any, of the cities of Israel at which he might present himself. But meanwhile he had only a few hundred soldiers with him, and was no match for the Philistines. Accordingly he was forced once more to seek refuge in his old retreat, the mountain hold of Adullam.¹ From this position he constantly harassed the enemy and gained the advantage in countless skirmishes. Upon this all whose hearts were stirred in the cause of Yahweh and of Israel streamed to him from all quarters of the land, and his forces gradually swelled until at last he felt strong enough to meet the Philistines in open field. In the valley of the Rephaites, near a place called Baal-Perazim, he utterly defeated them, and even took some of the images of their gods as spoil. According to the writer of the book of Samuel this place was called "Perez," that is *dispersion*, "because Yahweh *dispersed* the enemy there."² But the Philistines recovered from the blow, and brought such a powerful army back into the plain that when David consulted the oracle it advised him not to make an open attack. At the advice of the priests, therefore, he attempted a surprise. Creeping round the camp of the Philistines, he lay concealed behind them in a valley full of mulberry trees. As he was lying there a rushing sound came sweeping through the tops of the trees. It was Yahweh marching before his people to battle! The war cry of Israel rang through the air, and the Philistines were so utterly defeated that David pursued them to the very borders of their own land.

This victory finally established David's authority. He

¹ After an amended version of 2 Samuel v. 17; compare xxiii. 13, 1 Chronicles xi. 15. ² After an amended version.

was now surrounded by a band of chosen warriors. There had been many mighty men amongst his six hundred original followers, but their number was now greatly increased. For when he was at Ziklag many heroes had ranged themselves under his flag even before Saul's death,¹ and still more afterwards; and since he had settled in Hebron, and had been at war with the Philistines, their numbers had increased yet further, and their skill in handling their arms had been severely exercised. The fame of some of them had spread far and wide.² Several of them could boast of having slain hundreds of the enemy in a single day. It was said of another that he had once put a whole army of Philistines to flight with his single arm, and had fought until his fingers clung convulsively to his sword and could hardly be unclasped. Amongst thirty champions picked from David's chosen band there were three who had performed a feat of arms at which the king himself had stood amazed. Once, when they were in the fortress of Adullam, David thoughtlessly exclaimed, "Who will bring me a draught of water from the well in the gate of Bethlehem?" Now, a Philistine garrison held possession of Bethlehem at the time, while the main army was encamped in the valley of the Rephaites; but in spite of everything the three heroes set out, broke through the ranks of the enemy, drew water from the well of Bethlehem, and brought it to David in triumph! But he would not drink it. "It is the blood of my heroes!" he cried, as he poured it out before Yahweh. Even Benaiah could not measure himself against such as these. Yet Benaiah could boast of having slain the two sons of Ariel the Moabite, and once when a lion had fallen into a hole in the snowy season, he leapt in and slew the beast. Another time, unarmed except with his staff, he attacked a gigantic

¹ 1 Chronicles xii. 19—21.

² 2 Samuel xxiii. 8—39; 1 Chronicles xi. 10—xii.

Egyptian warrior, wrenched his spear from his hand, and slew him with it. David made him captain of his body-guard, to reward his valour. He had thirty of such heroes round him, and hosts of brave warriors stood under their command. There were Benjamites, for instance, famed of old as bowmen and slingers, and Gadites, with their huge shields and dreaded lances, stern of countenance as lions, and swift of foot as hinds. Once they had crossed the flooded Jordan at spring time.

With such followers as these something might be done; so as soon as the Philistines were expelled, David determined to strike a decisive blow. The Canaanite city of Jebus was an eye-sore to him. The Philistines had found it the key of Judah, and would certainly never have been able to maintain themselves so long in the valley of the Rephaites had not the Jebusites made common cause with them. David was now determined to have his revenge. But it was no light task to storm such a place as Jebus. Saul himself appears to have left it unassailed; and no wonder, for it seemed almost impregnable. It was situated in a dry unwatered district, on a limestone rock that rose precipitously on three sides from the surrounding valleys.¹ To the west and the south the mountain was encircled by the valley of the sons of Hinnom, and to the east a deep ravine, through which the Kidron flows, and which was afterwards called the valley of Jehoshaphat, separated it from the Mount of Olives. Again, the rock on which the city stood was itself split into two unequal halves by the "Cheesemakers' Valley," so that even if the eastern portion fell into the hands of the enemy, it by no means followed that the western half, upon which the citadel stood, need surrender. The city was weakest on its northern side, but even there it lay on the slope of the hill, and was fortified by walls and towers that

¹ See Map IV., *Jerusalem*; and *The Environs of Jerusalem*.

cut off the approach. The Jebusites had such perfect confidence in the natural strength of their city, that when they heard of David's enterprise they cried in derision, "Blind men and cripples could keep him out of Jebus!"¹ But pride comes before a fall. David appeared under the walls; his troops were glowing with enthusiasm, and when the command to storm the city was given, even the western quarter itself, Sion, afterwards called "the city of David," soon fell into the hands of the bold assailants. According to the Chronicles, Joab was the first to scale the wall. This Jebus, afterwards called Jerusalem, which, perhaps, means "abode of peace," was now chosen by David as his own residence, and the capital of the whole country. It was admirably suited for the purpose, both by the natural strength of its site, and by its geographical position, for it lay in the territory of Benjamin, which belonged to the North, and yet not far from the borders of David's tribesmen, the Judæans. The conqueror set to work at once to strengthen the city, and with that object built, as we are told, "all round from the Millo and inwards."

Would that the words just quoted were the only obscure expression to be met with in the descriptions of ancient Jerusalem and the changes which it has undergone in the course of centuries! But this is only one of many difficulties. The city has been the scene of so many interesting events that we naturally wish to form a clear conception of its appearance at different epochs. We should be especially glad to know what it was like in the time of Jesus. But if we compare the various plans of ancient Jerusalem, we see in a moment that the learned men who have studied the subject differ from each other in very important respects. This is but natural, for the city has been devastated so often that the Jerusalem of ancient times can no longer be recognised

¹ After an amended version.

in the modern city. Not only have the houses been destroyed again and again, but on more than one occasion valleys have actually been filled up and hills levelled. Not a trace can now be found of the Cheesemakers' Valley, for instance, that used to separate the city of David from the Mount of the Temple. Yet this was a deep ravine, the slopes of which had to be ascended and descended by steps.¹ The place where the valley ran is now level with the heights on either side. It has all been filled up with rubbish, upon the top of which streets have been laid down. If we cannot even form an accurate idea of what Jerusalem was like in the year 70 A.D., how much less can we hope to form a picture of it as it was ten centuries before the beginning of our era!

Of course we still have sufficient data to enable us to assume certain facts as at least probable; but, since we cannot attain to certainty, all our statements on this subject must be read with the mental addition of "probably," or "perhaps." With this reservation, then, we may assume that David took up his abode on the western hill, and that a castle called "the Millo" stood at the north-west corner of it. It was only this western hill that David surrounded by a wall. What was afterwards the mount of the temple was not included in it.

Soon after David had captured Jebus and made it his capital, he took a step which contributed in no small degree to establish his power. He was the darling of Yahweh's priests and prophets, and it was partly by their aid that he had become king of Israel. He therefore determined to give proof of his attachment to the service, and his zeal for the honour of Israel's national god. But he chose a less dangerous means of accomplishing his purpose than that adopted by his predecessor. Saul's fanatical zeal had urged

¹ See Map IV. *Jerusalem*, No. 8.

him to comply with the sanguinary demands of Yahweh, as understood by the prophets and their most fiery adherents, and his policy had alienated many of his subjects; but David determined to show his devotion by bringing the ark in which Yahweh himself lived to Jerusalem.

When last we heard of this sacred object it had just fallen into the hands of the Philistines,¹ and we have since been in danger of forgetting it altogether! Let us see what its fate has been meanwhile. We still possess a very elaborate account of it,² written by one who shared, to the fullest extent, the superstitious terror with which both Philistines and Israelites regarded this ark.

When the Philistines had gained the great victory over the Israelites which closed the life of Eli, they took the sacred chest of Yahweh to Ashdod, one of their five great cities, and set it down in the temple of Dagon, near to the image of the god himself. But behold! the next day the image was found prostrate, as if in reverence, before the ark of Yahweh. The priests, however, could not believe that the ark had really caused the fall of the image; so they simply set it up again and left it. But next day they saw a still more appalling sight. There stood the image in its place—but its head was broken off and its two hands lay on the threshold. Ever since that day the priests of Dagon in Ashdod have made it a custom to spring over the threshold of the sanctuary without setting their feet on it. They were not yet convinced of Yahweh's might; but when fearful plagues broke out, when many of the Ashdodites were smitten with ulcerous sores, and the field-mice multiplied so terribly that they ruined all the harvest, at last the very priests themselves began to be afraid of the ark, and admitted that it was the cause of all the misfortunes which had come upon their god and themselves. What was to be

¹ Vol. II., p. 26.

² 1 Samuel v. 1—vii. 1.

done with it? After mature deliberation the Philistine princes determined to take it to the city of Gath. But no sooner was it there than the Gittites were afflicted with the very same disease that had visited the men of Ashdod. Upon this their hearts were seized with terror, and they sent on the ark to Ekron. But the moment it arrived at this city the inhabitants raised a cry of horror. They feared the worst from its presence. And with good reason too, for before long deaths and diseases without number bore witness to the wrath of Yahweh, who thus maintained his honour. And now the Philistines were filled with dismay, and all the cities refused to receive the ark within their walls. So it stood for seven months in the open country, and even there it made the mice multiply so frightfully that at last the Philistines had to make up their minds to let Yahweh go back to his own country. The princes, therefore, ordered the priests and wizards seriously to consider how they were to send back the deity and be delivered from the plagues. Of course, they must give the offended god a sin-offering, and they soon decided on its nature. Five golden models of the ulcers with which the Philistines had been smitten, and five golden mice must be consecrated as an offering to Yahweh by the five princes. This would appease his wrath. It was very humiliating, no doubt, but nothing else would save them from the fate of the Egyptians, and they were compelled to make a virtue of necessity.

So they made the golden models for a sin-offering. But when all was ready, and the princes were preparing to send away the ark of Yahweh, the priests began to hesitate. It was so hard to lose such a splendid token of victory, and to give so rich a present to a hostile god! Suppose, after all, it was a mere accident that these plagues had broken out just while the ark was in the country! They would make one trial more. At their direction the ark was placed on a

waggon, and the little box containing the golden offering beside it. Then two heifers were yoked to the vehicle, while their sucking calves were shut up in a stall hard by. If the heifers went back to their calves, then the ark had nothing to do with the plagues that had come upon the Philistines; but if they turned towards the land of Israel, then it was evident that Yahweh had sent the plagues. The princes watched in anxious suspense to see what the heifers would do, and, behold! contrary to the instincts of their nature, they went straight off to Beth-Shemesh, though lowing for the loss of their calves! The Philistine kings went after them to see where they would take the waggon.

The inhabitants of Beth-Shemesh were busy with their wheat harvest when they found the ark resting on the waggon. It had stopped in the fields of a certain Joshua, close by a great stone. The people were filled with joy to find the sacred chest of Yahweh, took it up, broke the waggon into pieces, slaughtered the cattle, and offered them as a burnt-sacrifice to their god.

The Philistine princes returned to Ekron fully persuaded that all their disasters had been caused by Yahweh's wrath. What a terrible god he was! Terrible indeed—as some of the inhabitants of Beth-Shemesh itself were soon to find. The family of a certain Jechoniah had not taken part in the festivities held in honour of Yahweh; and seventy of them were punished by him with death.¹ All the men of Beth-Shemesh lamented the terrible event, and cried in horror "Who dare serve Yahweh, this holy god? How can we escape his wrath?" Finally they were much relieved to find that the men of Kirjath-jearim were willing to receive the ark. It was placed by its new guardians in the house of Abinadab, on the hill near to the city, and Abinadab's son, Eleazar, was put in charge of it as priest.

¹ After an amended version.

There it remained till David came to take it to Jerusalem. Then Yahweh showed once more what a terrible god he was. Accompanied by thirty thousand chosen Israelites—rather a large number one would think—David advanced to Kirjath-jearim, or as it was formerly called “the city of the Baal of Judah,” to take away the ark of God, “over which the name of Yahweh of hosts who sits upon the cherubs is invoked.” They set it on a new waggon, which was led by Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab. Uzzah walked by the side of the ark and his brother before it. David and all his followers went dancing and singing and playing upon all kinds of musical instruments in front of the sacred chest. But alas what a terrible end was soon to be put to their rejoicing! Uzzah suddenly fell down dead. The cause was easily guessed. In turning a sharp corner or descending a steep hill the oxen had nearly upset the waggon, and Uzzah had stretched out his irreverent hand and laid it on the ark to steady it! It was no excuse that he had thereby prevented it from falling. It was no matter whether he had intended any irreverence or not.¹ However unintentionally he had laid his hand upon Yahweh, and he was therefore slain by him. Mortal terror fell upon all present. How could David dare, after this, to take Yahweh’s ark any further? The place where all this happened was ever after known as Perez-Uzzah, that is, *the breaking of Uzzah*.

David now relinquished his design of taking the ark to Jerusalem, and entrusted it to the care of a certain Gittite of the name of Obed-Edom, in whose house it remained three months. It now appeared that the ark did not always bring misfortunes with it. If only it was treated with due reverence it was rich in blessings; for this Obed-Edom was wonderfully prosperous as long as it was in his house. When David was informed of this he again made great preparations

¹ See Vol. I. p. 105.

for bringing the ark to Jerusalem. It was placed once more on a waggon, or perhaps supported on the shoulders of certain men chosen for the purpose, and was carried forward with shouts of universal triumph. As soon as it was brought out of Obed-Edom's house an ox was sacrificed to Yahweh. Then they set out. Seven choruses of singers, who took up the strain in succession, accompanied David.¹ Thus, amidst ringing trumpet-peals, and incessant shouts of joy, David and all Israel conducted the ark to Jerusalem. The king himself, clothed only in the short linen garment of the priests, went dancing and striking the tambourine before Yahweh's face. Thus was the ark brought to Jerusalem and placed under a tent that had been erected for it. It need hardly be said that the day's festivities ended with a solemn sacrifice, after which David blessed the people in the name of Yahweh of hosts, and gave everyone present, man or woman, a loaf of bread, a certain quantity of wine, and a cake of raisins.

But David's exultation was by no means shared by his wife Michal, the daughter of Saul. When he had dismissed the assembly and was returning to his palace, she came indignantly to meet him, and greeted him with the scornful words, "How nobly the King of Israel has maintained his dignity to-day, dancing half naked before all his subjects!" David, in his present state of excitement and triumph, was by no means disposed to take such a rebuke meekly, and answered rather unfeelingly: "Yes! I will gladly dance before Yahweh, who has chosen me King of Israel above your father and all his house, however low I may sink in your eyes by doing so!" Upon this the historian remarks that, in consequence of her pride, Michal was never blessed with a child.

Thus the ark came to Jerusalem.

It is very curious, after reading this account in the book

¹ After an amended version.

of Samuel, to see how the writer of the Chronicles treats the same events. In his account of the first unsuccessful attempt he agrees with the older historian; but when he comes to tell us how the ark was finally brought to Jerusalem he transports us into quite a different world from that of David. He surrounds the king with Aaronites as priests, and Levites as their assistants. All these he duly classifies, and even mentions some of them by name. David gives express orders that the ark is to be carried on bearing-poles by the Levites, and a detailed account is given of how the chief singers, Heman, Asaph, and Ethan, stood at the head of the choirs, and how the priests with the sacred trumpets marched in front of the ark. Then we are told that in the tent in which the ark rested Asaph acted as chief singer; while Heman and Jeduthun were chief musicians, and Zadoc chief priest, at Gibeon, where the tabernacle, of which we shall speak presently, was situated. All this, the writer expressly reminds us, was in perfect conformity with the Law. We can easily understand the origin of this description. The old account, in which the ark is carried on a waggon, and no priests or Levites are so much as mentioned, must have been very distasteful to the devout readers of about 200 B.C., for it was in direct contradiction with the Law.¹ Such readers were not at all surprised to find that on the first journey from Kirjath-jearim, Yahweh had slain the sacrilegious Uzzah, who had dared to lay an unconsecrated hand upon the ark. But they were much surprised by the successful issue of the second journey. However, it was not expressly stated what means of conveyance were adopted, or who was present on this second occasion, and the pious imagination being thus left free to work, soon filled in the scene with figures which brought it entirely into harmony with the religious notions of a later time. The writer of the Chronicles

¹ Compare, for instance, Exodus xxv. 10—15; Numbers iv. 4—20, x. 1—10.

little dreamt that in David's time the Law did not exist at all, and that no one thought of the priesthood being confined exclusively to certain families. The Law was known in his day as "the law of Moses," and he never doubted its right to the title.

The writer of the Chronicles was a Levite, and apparently a member of the temple choir, for he is particularly fond of giving us details about the sacred music. He could not help thinking that David, the man after Yahweh's heart—the model of an Israelite king—must have busied himself with the arrangements of public worship. He thought it strange enough that he should have left it for his son to build the temple. But he knew very well that as a fact he had done so. He was not capable of quite so gross a blunder as that of the man who quietly wrote at the head of the thirtieth Psalm, "A song of David, for the consecration of the temple;"¹ but he gave his hero as great a share in building the temple and organising the worship as he possibly could.² He not only makes him collect treasure for this purpose, but tells us that he had the stones hewn, and prepared the iron required for the doors, as well as the brass and cedarwood.³ Moreover he makes him prepare the designs for the building, and all that pertained to it;⁴ or rather he makes him tell his son Solomon how these designs had been conveyed to him by Yahweh, for they were too sacred to be regarded as the mere work of man.⁵ Nay, if we are to believe the Chronicles, all the divisions of the priests and Levites, especially the musicians, and the arrangements of their work, were planned and settled by David. In a word, he is made what a pious king of the ancient time ought to have been, if public worship had been organised in his days as it was seven centuries later.

¹ After an amended version.

² 1 Chronicles xxii.—xxix.

³ 1 Chronicles xxii. 2–5.

⁴ 1 Chronicles xxviii. 11.

⁵ 1 Chronicles xxviii. 19.

The Chronicler tells us that the reason why David was not allowed to build the temple was that he had spilled so much blood¹—an idea which says more for the peaceful disposition of the priestly writer than for his insight into ancient history. In David's time no one would have dreamed of there being any impropriety in a prince who had waged many bloody "wars of Yahweh" building a house for the god in whose name he had fought.

The writer of the Chronicles was not the first who had been at a loss to understand why David had not built the temple. Even before the captivity, it had become difficult to think of the Israelite nation without the temple on Mount Sion—and then David was such a truly religious monarch! Accordingly, the book of Samuel tells us that when David was at rest from his wars, and dwelt in a palace of cedar-wood himself, he could not bear to think that Yahweh's ark had only a tent to dwell in. So he sent for the prophet Nathan, and told him how this thought was troubling him. Nathan ardently supported his idea of building a house for Yahweh. But that very night the man of God received a revelation from Yahweh himself; and at his command he went to David and told him that he must not build a temple, for it was against the will of Yahweh. He would rather live in a tent than in a house. But yet the thought of David's heart should be realised by his son, who would have a peaceful reign. For Yahweh promised David that he would establish his dynasty on the throne for ever. Upon this David bowed down in humble gratitude before Yahweh.

Such were the reasons given for David's not having built the temple when the book of Samuel was composed, that is to say, about the time of the captivity, when David's family had already reigned at Jerusalem some five centuries. But we cannot help noticing what an extraordinary contradiction

¹ 1 Chronicles xxii. 8, xxviii. 3.

is contained in Nathan's answer to David. The king must not build a temple for two reasons :—*firstly*, because Yahweh prefers to live in a tent, and *secondly* because David's son will build him a temple. But if Yahweh really preferred a tent for his dwelling place, why should Solomon any more than David be allowed to place him in a house of cedar ? Did Yahweh's character or inclination change ? The first part of Nathan's answer embodies an old and no doubt trustworthy tradition. There were persons in David's time, especially amongst the prophets, who were opposed to the erection of a temple for Yahweh, and thought a simple tent more in keeping with the special character of their god. It is not hard to guess their reasons. In many respects the prophets were men of the old school, and, as is often the case with earnest but perhaps somewhat narrow men, they dreaded advancing culture of every kind, especially in the arts and sciences, as giving occasion to luxury and display. Simple manners like those of the nomads pleased them best. To aim at knowledge too high for man, and at being like the deity, could be productive of nothing but evil. Building houses and cities led to licentiousness. A severe, simple, patriarchal life was best for man. Now people always imagine their gods to be what they think they ought to be themselves, and so these lovers of the wandering shepherd-life, these preachers of simplicity, believed that Yahweh their god would likewise choose a tent to dwell in rather than a palace.

But probably this alone would not have been enough to prevent David from carrying out his project of building a temple for Yahweh, if he had had time, or rather money and command of labour, sufficient for so great an undertaking. The book of Kings,¹ with great propriety, makes Solomon say, " My father could not build a house for Yahweh, because

¹ 1 Kings v. 3.

of the many wars he had to wage." But no doubt the influence of the prophets and their followers helped to prevent the building of a temple. David then was obliged to content himself with increasing the sacred treasure of Yahweh, and so making it possible for his son to undertake the work. This preliminary task he faithfully performed by always consecrating to Yahweh a part of the booty he seized in war.¹

Thus in David's reign Jerusalem had already become the political capital, and the city of Yahweh. It is true that the sanctuary there was not the only one dedicated to the god of Israel; on the contrary, it could hardly rank as yet with such places as the *bamah* at Gibeon, for instance. But just as the presence of the ark, which still accompanied the armies into the field,² conferred a kind of sanctity on the royal palace, near which it stood in times of peace, so on the other hand "Yahweh's anointed" conferred a certain distinction on the sanctuary which he honoured above all others. And thus Jerusalem became the centre of the political and religious life of Israel.

CHAPTER II.

THE HOUSE OF SAUL UNDER DAVID'S RULE.

2 SAMUEL IX., XXI. 1-14.

IN ancient times it was far from unusual for a king who had not inherited his crown from his father, but had won it by force of arms, to put to death the children and near relations of his predecessor, for fear of their heading a rebellion against him. We shall meet with instances of such conduct later on in the history of Israel. It is not surprising, then, that Saul's family should have felt alarm at David's

¹ 2 Samuel viii. 7-12; 1 Kings vii. 51.

² 2 Samuel xi. 11.

becoming king of all the tribes, and establishing his authority by the capture of Jerusalem. They had every reason to fear the worst.

But David had not forgotten his friendship for Jonathan. Was there any member of his family still living? Jonathan had been married, and had had at least one child, but neither David nor anyone about him knew what had become of him. This was natural enough, for the defeat at Gilboa had thrown all the country round into such terrible confusion that many an Israelite had disappeared during those troubled times and never been heard of since. Besides, as long as Ishbaal was reigning, David had known but little of what was going on in the North; and after the death of that monarch, all who had any affection for Saul's family thought that the less they said about them to David the better! But when he really wished to get at the truth, he was soon able to do so. He knew whom to ask for information. In the neighbourhood of Gibeah dwelt Ziba, Saul's former steward, who had managed the late king's estates. He was an influential man, and his fifteen sons and twenty dependents constituted a powerful "house." This Ziba was sure to have the information David wanted.

When satisfied that the king's purpose was friendly, Ziba told him that there was still one son of Jonathan's alive. He had had an accident when a child; for when the news of the defeat of the Israelite army and the death of his father reached his nurse she caught him up to carry him to some place of safety from the Philistines. But in her haste she fell down with the child, who was then five years old, and he was crippled in both his feet by the fall.¹ It is a great misfortune even now for a man to lose the use of his legs, but in ancient times it was still worse. For in those days war and the chase were looked upon as the chief, or at least

¹ 2 Samuel iv. 4.

as the most honourable occupations of life, and great importance was therefore attached to bodily strength. A man who walked on crutches would never be held in high estimation. Ziba told David where to find this boy, whose name is given as Mephibosheth, but was really Meribaal.¹ He was at Lodebar, a place east of the Jordan, near Mahanaim, the former residence of Ishbaal.

David sent for him at once. As soon as he entered the royal presence, he threw himself in mingled reverence and terror upon the ground, and when asked whether he was Meribaal, answered humbly "Thy servant." David hastened to reassure him by the friendly words, "Fear not! I will be kind to you for your father's sake; for Jonathan was my friend. I will give you back all the estates of Saul, and you shall have a place at my own table." The cripple bowed in humble gratitude, and answered, "What am I that you should deign to look upon me? I am but a dead dog!" Such servile language was often addressed to kings,² and was particularly natural in the mouth of a member of the fallen dynasty. David lost no time in putting the affairs of his ward in order, and instructed Ziba to manage Saul's possessions for his grandson, as he had formerly done for the king himself. He also gave orders that Meribaal, who remained permanently at court, should be treated as a prince of the blood.

The book of Samuel adds that Meribaal had a little son, Micha. From the expression "a little son" we should imagine that the child was already born when Meribaal came to court. But this can hardly be the case; for Meribaal himself cannot have been more than eleven years old at most when David took Jerusalem, and it is difficult to believe that the king allowed many years to elapse after that event without enquiring after Jonathan's posterity. However this may be, Meribaal appears to have had but one son, who

¹ See Vol. II. p. 196.

² 1 Samuel xxiv. 14, xxvi. 20.

was therefore the sole legitimate representative of the house of Saul. For this monarch had only four sons by wives of the first rank, namely, the three that died on the battle-field with their father, and Ishbaal; and all of them except Jonathan appear to have died childless. Four or five centuries later the descendants of this Micha still formed a considerable "house" in Israel.¹

But although Meribaal and his son were the only legitimate heirs of Saul in David's time, yet there were other members of the "house" of Saul—for this phrase included his sons by wives of the second rank, or concubines, the children of his daughters, the descendants of his younger brothers, and yet more distant relatives. This "house of Saul" might seem at first to threaten the stability of David's throne, but a heavy blow soon fell upon it, of which we shall now give the particulars.

David had not long been king over all Israel before years of tribulation came upon his people. Again and again the harvest failed for want of rain, or swarms of locusts destroyed the hope of the husbandman. Besides this, no doubt the civil war which was only just over had seriously interfered with the welfare of the people, and had thrown many a plot of land out of cultivation.

"What can be the cause of this famine?" was asked on every side; nor did it lie in the spirit of the age to set about investigating the natural causes of the disaster. "Some sin has been committed, and our god now visits it upon us," people muttered, as they strove to discover what offence it was that had brought this misery upon them. Had the people forgotten their god? No, for the altars had smoked with countless victims. Had the king been guilty of some sin which Yahweh was visiting on his people? No such offence could

¹ 1 Chronicles viii. 34—40 (ix. 40—44.)

be discovered. Then was it some crime of the former ruler that was now brought back to their memory? There were some of David's subjects who thought they knew of such a crime, and declared, with some hesitation at first, but more and more distinctly as the famine went on year after year, what they held to be the cause of these disasters. They were the Gibeonites. It will be remembered that Saul, in his zeal for the sanctity of his people, and under the conviction that they were polluted by intermingling with other nations, had attempted to root out the Gibeonites.¹ But that was a violation of an ancient oath, and surely the god of Israel would maintain the sanctity of an oath sworn in his name. He was now punishing the people for the sin of their former king. That was the meaning of the famine.

The Gibeonites—full of vengeful hatred against Saul, lying in wait for an opportunity of satisfying their passion—had doubtless rejoiced in the fall of his house, and now thought they had a chance of inflicting a bloody retribution on it. So when the famine still went on, and everyone was crying, "O Yahweh! wherefore is it?" they renewed their complaint and answered: "For the murder of our fellow-citizens, for the perjury of Saul, must Israel suffer." Now the mass of the people had never heartily approved of the furious zeal of Saul. They were more inclined for peace than war with the Canaanite tribes; moreover they looked towards the rising sun, as the populace always does, and forgot the benefits conferred upon them by Saul to bask in the light of David; so they eagerly accepted this solution of the great problem, and public opinion gradually declared, "We owe this famine to the blood of the Gibeonites cleaving to the house of Saul! That is the sin for which Yahweh is punishing us, and as long as the Gibeonites curse us we shall never be blessed!"

¹ See Vol. II., pp. 274 f.

During all this time David had doubtless often consulted the deity, sought help from priests, from prophets, and from dreamers, and asked them the cause of Yahweh's wrath. And now at last he received a distinct answer. We are not told how he consulted his god, but the oracle pointed in response to the wrongs of the Gibeonites.

David summoned the elders of Gibeon, and asked them how the guilt which Saul had brought upon himself and the people could be washed out. At first they answered evasively. It was not a thing, they said, that could be made good by money; and they—Canaanite outcasts as they were—could not do what an Israelite might have done, and indeed would have felt bound to do, in their case. They could not exact vengeance, and wipe out the debt of blood by slaying those who had injured them. But when David solemnly repeated his assurance that he was ready to satisfy their demands, they said, "Then give us seven of that man's sons who persecuted us, and we will crucify them on the sacred hill, before the face of Yahweh, in Gibeah-of-Saul. For there our enemy had his abode, and thence he gave the order to destroy us. Then Yahweh's wrath will be turned away, and we will bless Israel again, and he will be gracious to his people."

What a hideous demand! And yet by no means foreign to the spirit of the age. For in those days, as we have often noticed, people held that natural occurrences were revelations of God's wrath, and that he might be appeased by such frightful sacrifices as the one of which we are speaking; and it was still regarded as one of the principles of justice that the children should be put to death for the father's crime.

David assented to the demands of the Gibeonites. What was going on in his own heart we cannot tell. Did he rejoice in the opportunity of putting the descendants of his predecessor out of the way? Such a reproach was afterwards

thrown in his teeth by the relatives of Saul,¹ but with what justice, it is of course impossible to say. It may be that he granted the Gibeonites' request in sorrow; that he was himself entangled in the superstitions of his people, and genuinely believed that it was necessary thus to appease the injured Gibeonites. In any case it is well to observe that, by this action, David condemned the form which Saul's religious zeal had taken, and thus laid down another line of action for himself.

It was left to David to decide which of Saul's male descendants were to die. He spared Meribaal, the son of Jonathan, and chose Armoni and Meribaal, the two sons of Rizpah, one of Saul's concubines, and the five sons of Merab,² Saul's eldest daughter. Such is the caprice of fortune! Saul had once thought Merab too good for David,³ and she was now bereft of her five sons by the orders of her rejected suitor.

It was spring time. The season of the so-called latter rain was over. The scanty harvest—for it had failed again—was gathered in. The ill-fated seven were conducted in solemn procession to the sacred hill whence Gibeah-of-Saul derived its name, which served as a place of worship for the whole neighbourhood. Here, in the sight of the assembled crowd and with solemn prayers to Yahweh, the victims were first, in all probability, stoned to death and then fixed to the cross. Then the bodies were left hanging, for the birds of prey and the wild beasts to devour, that the bones might keep the people's fervent prayers and the atonement for the broken oath in the memory of Israel's god and turn away his wrath, that he might send his people rain.

When the sacrifices were completed and the hill once more deserted, Rizpah, the mother of two of the victims,

¹ 2 Samuel xvi. 5—8.

² 2 Samuel xxi. 8. Michal is written by mistake for Merab.

³ 1 Samuel xviii. 17—19.

took, in the agony of her soul, a desperate resolve. She had not been able to rescue her children; but she would save them, if possible, from the shame of being rent by dogs and birds, instead of being laid in the family grave, for such a fate was unutterably horrible in the eyes of an Israelite. So she stretched out her mourning garment on the rock to serve as a tent, and began her fearful watch at the foot of the crosses. And by day when the vultures swooped down upon the prey, or the croaking ravens flapped round the stakes, she darted from her tent, lance in hand, or sounded her horn to scare away the creatures that would violate her dead. The nights were long—in Palestine the shortest night of summer lasts ten hours—and often, when weary with her constant cries and exhausted by the heat of the sun, she lost her cares for a moment in sleep, she would start up again at the howling of the jackals and the baying of the hounds, in terror, not for herself, but for the ghastly treasure that she guarded.

The inhabitants of Gibeah looked on with growing wonder and admiration. The woman they had known living in all the luxury of the court of Saul, though only a wife of the second rank, the woman whose intrigue with Abner had brought Ishbaal to his fall, could hardly have been expected to rise to such heroic devotion. They gladly brought her the necessary food; and as they offered prayers and sacrifices by the sacred stone upon the hill, or beneath the shadow of the consecrated oak or terebinth, they cursed the tyrant that Rizpah cursed! Was it not their townsman and relative to whose throne he had succeeded, and was it not his hatred that pursued these seven children of the monarch even to the death?

Rizpah's heroic endurance was put to a fearful test. Weeks and months crept on wearily. The scorching heat of the summer sun parched the hill side till it was almost

more than human strength could bear to remain there at the foot of the crosses. How often Rizpah must have cried, as she flung herself upon the ground by her ghastly charge, "Yahweh! how long will the heart of the tyrant who persecutes our race be hardened against our misery? When will he suffer my children to be laid in the grave? O Lord, let this sacrifice appease thee! Give us rain and a fruitful season!"

The end came at last. For six long months, from April till October, she had persevered. The season of the autumn rains had come, and lo! the skies were overcast and the clouds rolled up together. God was appeased, and had accepted the sacrifice.

And David's heart melted when he heard of all that Rizpah had done. Why should he insist any longer on the corpses hanging up before the face of Yahweh? The rain had begun to fall already. Surely he might bury them now, and at the same time show his enemy and his predecessor on the throne the honours due to a king. So he brought the bones of Saul and Jonathan from Jabesh in Gilead and buried them, with the seven other corpses, in the family tomb of Saul. —

Our eyes have rested on a dismal scene. The vengeful hatred of the Gibeonites, the superstition of both king and people, and, it may be, the cruelty of David's calculating policy, brought unspeakable suffering upon guiltless heads; and it deeply wounds our moral and religious sense when the writer who has told us the whole story calmly concludes his narrative with the words, "Thus was God made propitious to the land." But there is one bright spot in the darkness of the scene—the faithful love of Rizpah as she guards the bodies of her sons. Her courage and devotion nobly illustrate the power of a mother's love, and restore our drooping faith in human nature.

CHAPTER III.

THE MIGHT OF DAVID, KING OF ISRAEL.

2 SAMUEL VIII., X.¹

WHEN David had fortified Jerusalem he felt strong enough to assume the offensive against the surrounding peoples. The Philistines naturally came first; for in spite of the two defeats they had sustained on the plain of the Rephaites, their warlike spirit was by no means broken; and, nominally at least, David's people were still tributary to them. So the conflict with the Philistines was renewed, and raged so fiercely that the king himself, who took the field in person, almost lost his life. A warrior of terrific strength had singled him out and would certainly have made an end of him had not the valiant Abishai, Joab's brother, come to his rescue and slain the Philistine. David's warriors were so much alarmed by the danger their prince had incurred that they made him take an oath never more to go to battle with them in person, "lest the lamp of Israel should be put out." It was in one of these campaigns that Goliath was slain by Elhanan the Bethlehemite, an exploit which was afterwards attributed to David.² Another gigantic Gittite was laid low by Jonathan, the son of David's brother Shimeah.³ At last the Philistines were so completely humbled that all idea of Israel's paying tribute to them was abandoned.⁴

Then David turned his weapons eastward and attacked the Moabites, whom he made tributary. We have no means of knowing what it was that impelled him to attack these old friends of his to whose king he was under such

¹ 1 Chronicles xviii.—xx.

² Vol. II. p. 346.

³ 2 Samuel xxi. 15—22.

⁴ After an amended version of 2 Samuel viii. 1.

great obligations,¹ and we are shocked to read that in accordance with a barbarous custom of war he massacred two-thirds of the prisoners, and only spared one-third alive. The Chronicler does not mention this fact, and if it is because he is ashamed to record such deeds on the part of his hero, the omission does honour to his heart.

Next came the Syrians, whose country lay between the kingdom of Israel and the Euphrates. David was anxious, for commercial reasons, to extend his dominion to the banks of the great river, and therefore attacked the Syrian princes of Zobah, Damascus, and Hamath, who were at variance amongst themselves and therefore in no position to offer a successful resistance. On the defeat of the two first the third also submitted. Thousands of captives fell into David's hands, together with a number of war chariots, all of which he destroyed except one hundred. Moreover, he seized as spoil the golden coats of mail worn by the body guard of Hadad-ezer, king of Zobah, and a quantity of brass, from which Solomon afterwards made a number of utensils for the temple, and amongst them the celebrated vat known as the "brazen sea." David appointed governors over the districts of Syria; and immediately on his return defeated the Edomites in the valley of Salt, and placed their country also under a governor. We may note in passing that the fortieth psalm is said to have been composed on this occasion. After this victory, which was followed by a fearful massacre,² David erected a triumphal column.

Thus all the neighbours of Israel were subdued, with the exception of the Ammonites, whose king, Nahash, was on friendly terms with David. But when Nahash died his son Hanun was so rash as to insult the ambassadors of David, who came to express their monarch's sympathy with the young king on the death of his father. Upon this war broke

¹ See Vol. II. pp. 357 f.

² 1 Kings xi. 15, 16.

out at once. The Syrian princes took advantage of this turn of affairs to throw off the yoke of Israel, but Joab routed them repeatedly, and compelled them to leave the Ammonites to their fate. All the strength of Israel was now turned against Ammon. The ark was fetched to the seat of war.¹ Rabbah, the capital of the Ammonites, offered a brave resistance, but at last the lower city fell into the hands of Joab. Upon this the general urged David to come to the scene of action in person that he might have the honour of taking the city himself. All resistance was soon overpowered, and the inhabitants were put to death with barbarous tortures.

There was one of his neighbours with whom David always kept upon good terms, and that was the king of Tyre. The Israelite tradition calls him Hiram;² but since Hiram was a contemporary of Solomon, it is probable that David's friend was Hiram's father, Abibal. The inhabitants of the powerful city of Tyre, like those of other Phœnician cities, lived by commerce, and had therefore every reason to desire peace and quiet, especially as they were dependent upon their neighbours for their supply of corn and other necessaries of life. And, again, the friendship of these industrious and enterprising commercial cities was of great value to the Israelites, especially to the inhabitants of the northern districts, who were themselves to some extent engaged in maritime commerce, as well as in the carrying trade between Mesopotamia and Syria on the one side and Egypt and Phœnicia on the other. Thus it happened that Israel and the Phœnician cities nearly always stood in friendly relations to each other.

When David had subdued almost all his neighbours, and thus confirmed his power, he made a treaty with the Tyrian king, by which the latter was bound to supply him with a great quantity of the cedar wood produced by Mount Lebanon,

¹ 2 Samuel xi. 11.

² 2 Samuel v. 11.

which lay within the territory of Tyre. Besides this he sent a number of workmen to build David a palace. It seems strange that foreign carpenters and masons had to be called in for this purpose. Were there no competent workmen in Israel? we ask. But we must remember that the Israelites were still very deficient in knowledge of the arts and sciences. It would have been impossible for the Philistines to carry away all the smiths out of the land, as they did just before Saul ascended the throne, had not the number of these skilled artificers been very small. Then, again, the Israelites of the old school, the followers of Samuel, had always looked with suspicion upon all attempts to improve the arts of life and extend the limits of human knowledge.¹ Remember, for instance, how the legend of Cain and his posterity stamps as unholy the invention of musical instruments and the art of forging iron!² This special legend was no doubt written at a later period, but its spirit is the same as that which inspired the nazarites and prophets of the time of Saul. These men would certainly discourage the training of skilled artisans, and the consequence was that when David determined to build a truly regal palace he had to call in the aid of foreign workmen.

David soon dwelt in a princely residence, in which he held a luxurious court. Even at Hebron he had had more wives than one, but now he added considerably to their number, and indeed established a regular harem on a rather extensive scale, in which several of Saul's wives and concubines were placed.³ Here, in his palace, King David sat on state occasions to receive the homage of all the tribes of Israel and the subjugated peoples, his temples encircled by a diadem, while, suspended over his head, hung the great crown, heavy with gold and precious stones, which he had

¹ Compare p. 15.

² Vol. I. pp. 75 ff.

³ 2 Samuel xii. 8.

seized at Rabbah, the capital of the Ammonites.¹ Here he sat in judgment over such of his subjects as submitted their cause to his decision, from which there was no appeal.² And a merry life was led in the palace, for the royal table was prepared from day to day for the reception of countless officers and guests, whose palates were flattered by the choicest viands and their ears soothed by strains of sweetest music.³ There artists of every description were sure of a good reception, but above all music was diligently cultivated, the king himself taking the lead in inventing new kinds of music and improving the instruments.⁴ There high officials gathered round the royal throne,⁵ amongst whom were Joab, the captain of the host, with the chief ministers of state, Jehoshaphat the chancellor, Adoram the treasurer, Seraiah the king's private secretary, together with others of his special advisers, the chief priests Zadok and Abiathar, the princes of the blood, who were most of them also priests,⁶ and other members of the royal house. These distinguished nobles again had in many cases courts of their own, and often appeared at the palace with a numerous retinue. Joab, for instance, had ten private squires,⁷ and we may gain some idea of the military pomp that surrounded the palace from the fact that whenever the crown prince appeared in public he was surrounded by a body guard of fifty warriors in addition to all his other followers.⁸

Watch was kept over the palace by the dreaded body guard known as the Krethi and Plethi, under the command of Benaiah. It is doubtful whether this designation should be translated "executioners and messengers," or "Cretans and Philistines." If this latter translation is the true one, it shows that David surrounded himself with a guard of

¹ 2 Samuel xii. 30. ² 2 Samuel viii. 15. ³ 2 Samuel xix. 35.

⁴ Amos vi. 5. ⁵ 2 Samuel viii. 16—18, xx. 23—26.

⁶ After an amended version of 2 Samuel viii. 18.

⁷ 2 Samuel xviii. 15.

⁸ 2 Samuel xv. 1; 1 Kings i. 5.

foreign mercenaries. This practice has often been adopted in every age, and at courts that have had nothing else in common with each other. It rests upon the idea that a band of strangers who have no stake in the various interests which may raise the people in rebellion, can be far more implicitly relied on to defend the monarch upon whom they are entirely dependent than any of his own subjects can. At the court of David, then, these warlike Philistines filled the post which the Swiss mercenaries occupied in later times at certain European courts, such as that of France.

The royal style in which David lived, and the magnificence with which he surrounded his throne, were but the natural consequences of the wealth he had acquired and the power he had gained by his successful wars. The mass of the people were doubtless pleased by all this splendour, and took a pride in the majesty of the crown; for it is natural to man, especially at a low stage of intellectual and moral development, to take delight in every glittering show. And, besides, the glory of the king might be regarded in more respects than one as the glory of the people; for it was by chastising the foes of Israel and making Israel a name of terror all around that David had risen to such a height. Again, the king's prerogative was unlimited by any kind of law or constitutional restriction. He had full power to dispose of the property and the persons of his subjects; and people can bear to be ruled or even oppressed if it so happen by one who is surrounded with a glow of splendour better than by one who is as simple as his fellows in his life and surroundings. No doubt, then, the feeling of the populace is reflected in the words of an Israelite proverb-maker, who said in after times: "There are three things that step out well, four things that go forth bravely: A lion, the strongest of beasts, a slim greyhound or a ram, and a king whom none can withstand."¹

¹ Proverbs xxx. 29—31.

From the very conception of royalty in ancient times, it follows that the king's person was regarded as sacred and inviolable, and that he was held in the utmost reverence. "For his wrath was a messenger of death, whom none but the wise could appease; while the light of his countenance was the giver of life, and his favour refreshed as a rain-cloud."¹ In an age when every judicial sentence was readily accepted as an utterance of God,² it might well be said of the monarch, "The sentence of God is on the lips of the king; in pronouncing justice he never errs."³ "When a king sits down on the seat of judgment he scatters all evil abroad with his eyes."⁴ "Though the glory of God lie in concealing, the honour of the king is in searching out."⁵ When points of importance were at stake, and life or death, peace or war, hung on the will of the ruler, many an inquiring glance was fixed on his countenance. Which way would the scale incline? And if nothing betrayed the monarch's thought, his subjects would whisper one to another, "As the height of the heaven and the depth of the earth are immeasurable, so none can fathom the heart of the king."⁶ "Might is right" was a principle still less frequently challenged in antiquity than in our own day, so that not only prudence, but even virtue required anyone who came into contact with the king to observe the following injunctions:—"Keep the king's commandments, if only for the oath's sake made to God. Depart not trembling from his presence, but neither remain before him if the business is not sound; for the king does whatever he chooses since his word is mighty, and there is none to say to him 'What doest thou?'"⁷

It was not only prudence that urged the Israelite to bow down before his king in reverence for an established and

¹ Proverbs xvi. 14, 15.

² Exodus xviii. 15, 16; Deuteronomy i. 17.

³ Proverbs xvi. 10.

⁴ Proverbs xx. 8.

⁵ Proverbs xxv. 2.

⁶ Proverbs xxv. 3.

⁷ Ecclesiastes viii. 2-4.

formidable power. Religion, too, enforced the same lesson. Or rather submission to the prince clothed itself in religious forms. As the anointed of Yahweh, the king was inviolable; and since the interests of a people and of that people's god were so nearly identical in the eyes of the ancients that zeal for the one was necessarily zeal for the other, it followed that Israel's king, who waged the wars of Yahweh and executed his sentence upon evil-doers, must be revered as his representative. "Thou shalt not curse God, nor revile the prince of thy people,"—these two commandments were closely connected in the mind of the Israelite.¹ To rebel against the ruler was to attack Yahweh himself; and the king's enemies were the enemies of Yahweh. This feeling comes out very strongly in the following poem,² which was composed by a king of Israel, or at least in the name of one, at a time when the monarchy was at the height of its glory. The exact date is unknown, and is of no consequence for our purpose:—

Why do the heathen rage

And the peoples devise vain plots?

Why do the kings of the earth rise up

And the princes plot against Yahweh and his anointed?

"Let us break their bands asunder

And let us shake off their yoke!"

He who sits in the heavens shall laugh them to scorn,

The Lord shall have them in derision.

Then shall he speak to them in his wrath

And thunder against them in fury:

"I have anointed my king over Zion,

Over my sacred mount!"

Let me speak of Yahweh's decree!

He has said to me: "Thou art my son!"

¹ Exodus xxii. 28; Proverbs xxiv. 21; 1 Kings xxi. 10, 13.

² Psalm ii.

This day have I given thee birth !

Ask me, and I will give thee the heathen for a heritage
And the ends of the earth for a possession.

Thou shalt pasture them with an iron staff,
And dash them to pieces like an earthen vessel."

Wherefore, ye kings ! be wise ;
Take warning ye judges of earth !

Serve Yahweh in fear,
And tremble as ye sing his praise !

Cleave to him¹ that he grow not wrath ;
Should his anger kindle even a little ye will perish as ye
go on your way.

Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.

When the poet sings : " This day have I given thee birth,"
he means by " to-day " the day of the king's accession, upon
which he became the son of Yahweh.

It is true we have no direct proof that " son of God " or
" son of Yahweh " was a usual title of honour assumed by
the king of Israel, for it only occurs in this passage. But
such a title would be exceedingly natural, for the Israelites
were quite accustomed to express a confidential relation
between a superior and an inferior under the image of a
father and a son.² How natural such an expression would
be to an Israelite may be seen from the following promise
concerning Solomon, which is put into the mouth of Yahweh :
" I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me ;
and when he sins I will chastise him with the rod of a man,
with such stripes as mortals lay on one another."³ Moreover,
it was customary amongst all ancient peoples to call their
princes the sons of some deity or other ; and we can hardly
believe that Israel formed an exception, especially as we

¹ After an amended version.

² Compare Exodus iv. 22 ; Hosea xi. 1 ; Judges xvii. 10, xviii. 19 ;
2 Kings ii. 12, xiii. 14, v. 13.

³ 2 Samuel vii. 14.

know that the king was called an "angel of God," whose judgment was always true and whose actions must always be considered good.¹

The danger was only too great that a man who was raised to such a height should get an exaggerated idea of his own importance. Such a test would be too hard for almost anyone's humility. Who could retain a modest estimate of himself if he were told on every possible occasion that he was the representative of God, that his "heart was like a stream of water that Yahweh guided whither he would?"² We need not be surprised at the caprice and oppression that were but too common, and the heavy yoke which many a king laid upon the necks of his subjects.

CHAPTER IV.

GAD AND NATHAN BEFORE YAHWEH'S ANOINTED.

2 SAMUEL XXIV., XI., XII.*

THOUGH the king was bound by no law, yet there was a force in the land which he could not long defy with impunity. Public opinion made itself felt with a strength proportioned to the people's love of freedom and consciousness of power; and when it was supported and enforced by circumstances, the king was morally compelled to listen to it. We have seen already how a three years' famine compelled David to give ear to the demands of the Gibeonites, and sacrifice seven sons of Saul to their vengeance. On another occasion he was crossed in a cherished scheme by the breaking out of a plague.

The account of this latter circumstance is given us by writers who adopted without reserve the superstitious idea

¹ 2 Samuel xiv. 17, xix. 27.

² Proverbs xxi. 1.

^{*} 1 Chronicles xxi.

that the plague was sent by Yahweh as a punishment. The consequence is that they have imbedded this conception in the narrative, but it has not materially affected their account of the facts themselves.

Some time after the three years' famine had ended in the execution of the sons of Saul, David determined to take a census of his people. This project was certainly no mere idle whim on his part. It must have had some definite object, though we cannot exactly say what. It may have been intended to regulate the system of taxation and compulsory service, or it may have been a measure preparatory to raising a standing army. But whatever his object might be, David wished to ascertain the number of men capable of bearing arms in every tribe of Israel. The project, however, met with a vigorous opposition from the courtiers as soon as it was communicated to them, and the populace also regarded it with dislike. The prophets were certainly against it. They had already seen with grief that Israel's king was treading more and more completely in the footsteps of the heathen monarchs. He lived a life of luxury, dwelt in a fortified city, kept chariots of war, and surrounded himself with a foreign body guard instead of trusting entirely to the favour of Yahweh, and striving to retain it by zeal for his glory. And this census was such an innovation! What did it matter how numerous the people might be? In time of war the victory depended upon Yahweh's help; not upon the strength of the army; and a regular system of taxation must have been an abomination in the eyes of men who already looked upon the splendour of the court with displeasure. The masses of the people were probably little influenced by these religious motives in their opposition to the census, but they looked upon it with that vague suspicion that generally sets the populace against any novelty. If the king's project was connected with a system of taxation and compulsory ser-

vices, the opposition of the people was not unnatural. A king who held such a court as David's was expensive enough already! But enough of these conjectures. Whatever may have been the cause, public opinion declared itself strongly against the census. Joab was ordered by the king to carry out the measure and to traverse the whole country, accompanied by certain high officials, for the purpose. On this he took courage to lay his objections before David. "May Yahweh your god," he said, "multiply the people a hundred fold, and may my lord the king live to see it! But I would not have you hold this census." The other officers expressed their sympathy with Joab's words; but the monarch held to his determination, made light of their fears, and repeated his commands. There was nothing more to be said after this. The king ought to know best! So Joab, however reluctantly, obeyed his orders.

The census began in the district east of Jordan. Joab and his retinue took up their position near Aroer, in a plain south of the city, and thither they summoned all the men of military age in the district and took down their numbers. Then they went northward, through Gilead and Bashan right up to Dan, the ancient Laish. Then they crossed the Jordan and went southwards by the land of the Phœnicians till they came at last to Beer-sheba. Then they turned north again through Judah up to the district of Jerusalem. Benjamin was left to the last. They had been nearly ten months taking the census, and had not yet finished when the work was suddenly interrupted by an outbreak of the plague.¹ The king's officers returned in terror to their master, gave him the results they had obtained so far, and told him why they had not brought their work to a conclusion. It is quite possible that the census itself may have had something to do with the breaking out of this plague, for whenever people are crowded

¹ 1 Chronicles xxvii. 24.

together in one place, infectious diseases are very apt to spread. The Israelites, however, did not stop to think of this or any other natural cause, but immediately saw the chastening hand of Yahweh in the plague that afflicted them.

David, then, had no sooner heard of this fearful scourge than he began to feel uneasy. Was it a sign of God's displeasure? That could hardly be! And yet when the plague went on spreading, and multiplied its victims daily, he no longer dared to deny all connection between its ravages and the census he had held. The thought grew stronger and stronger in his heart: "I have sinned! I have acted very foolishly!" He read the same conviction on the faces of his courtiers; he heard how the people murmured, and accused him of having caused the plague by the deed that had made Yahweh wrath; and his seer, the prophet Gad, did not shrink from telling him in so many words that his sin was the cause of his people's suffering. David was deeply moved. Hitherto Jerusalem itself had escaped, but rumours of the advance of the disease grew more and more disturbing. It was rapidly approaching. Cases had already appeared on the other side of the Mount of Olives. David was altogether humbled at last. He threw himself down in deep depression by the ark of Yahweh, with his face turned towards the East, gazing over the north-eastern peak of Zion towards the Mount of Olives. 'It was as if he could see the angel of death, sent by Yahweh, with naked sword, ready to smite Jerusalem! The thought of his wretched people's suffering was more than he could bear. "O Yahweh," he broke out, "it is only I, the shepherd, who have sinned, but what have these sheep done? If thou wilt punish this sin, then turn upon me and mine!" Meanwhile terror reigned supreme throughout Jerusalem. And well it might! The raging plague, for which no cure had been discovered, which might depopulate whole cities in a few short hours, was drawing near. Round David lay the

priests stretched upon the ground, fasting and praying before Yahweh's face. Could no means be found to appease him and to turn away the angel of destruction from the royal city? Amongst those who surrounded the king was Gad, his seer. What is it that has come upon this man so suddenly? The sound of the sacred horns rings through the air, to bring to Yahweh's memory the supplications of his people, when lo! the hand of God is laid upon the prophet: "I see him," he cries aloud; "I see the destroying angel!—Yahweh draws near!—Oh pity us!—See there! he stands over Araunah's threshing-floor.—It is not yet too late.—Rise up, O king, says Yahweh; rise up and go to meet the angel, and make a sacrifice to Israel's rock; let Yahweh smell the smoke of a meat offering, and he will pity us!"

Yahweh had spoken. There was no time to lose. The monarch rose to his feet, and all around him made ready. The procession was in motion almost instantly. The drums rumbled and the trumpets rang, while the servants of the temple advanced, uttering cries of woe and beating their breasts, with their heads covered with ashes. Then followed the priests and the king. David had put aside his royal garments and was clothed with a simple *ephod*, while all his courtiers were dressed in mourning apparel. "O Yahweh, pity!" And thus the procession passed through David's city and the Valley of the Cheesemakers, and up the western slope of the little hill where Araunah the Jebuzite had his abode. As soon as Araunah saw the procession he hastened to meet his king, bowed down to earth in reverence before him, and asked the reason of his coming. David told him that he desired to buy his threshing-floor from him to build an altar to Yahweh on it, and so to avert the plague. On this Araunah placed the piece of ground itself, his oxen, his threshing-flails, and other wooden instruments at the king's service, and refused to receive payment for them. If Yahweh

would graciously accept the offering and stay the plague, he would gladly give his property as a free gift; but David would not accept the offer. He insisted on paying the full price of all he needed, for he would not make a sacrifice to Yahweh that had cost him nothing. So fifty shekels of silver were weighed out for Araunah; and David built an altar on the threshing-floor, and made a solemn sacrifice to Yahweh on it. When all was over the royal procession returned again to the palace, with a little gleam of hope. And their hope soon deepened to a certainty, for Jerusalem escaped altogether, and before long the violence of the plague was exhausted. The sacrifice had accomplished its purpose, Yahweh was appeased, and David's sin washed out.

The place where this sacrifice was made was afterwards the mount of the temple. This is evident from certain words which the writer of the book of Samuel added when he mentioned the altar. They have fallen out of the Hebrew text, but are preserved in the Greek translation, and run as follows:—"Solomon afterwards enlarged this altar, for at first it was but small." The writer of Chronicles who tries, as we have seen,¹ to give David as much of the credit of building the temple as possible, declares that he fixed upon this place as the site of the future temple,² and explains the name of the hill *Moriah*, or "appearance of Yahweh," from the "appearance" vouchsafed to David there.³ The important part afterwards played in the religious life of Israel by the spot upon which David built this altar gave a special interest to the story of the census and its consequences. The writer of the books of Samuel accepted without hesitation the superstitious belief that this plague was sent to punish David's sin, and of course his conception of the events is strongly coloured by this idea. He gives his explanations of the facts as

¹ See p. 13.

² 1 Chronicles xxii. 1.

³ 2 Chronicles iii. 1. Compare Vol. I. p. 192.

though they were the facts themselves; tells us that Yahweh was wrath with Israel, and therefore stirred up David to take a census; and that he afterwards ordered the destroying angel, who stood by the threshing-floor of Araunah, to draw back the hand that grasped the sword of death. Nay, he goes still further and tells us that Gad, the seer, had given David the choice beforehand of the disaster by which his sin should be punished—a three years' famine, a three months' defeat before the enemy, or a three days' plague. David, he tells us, exclaimed, "I am deeply troubled, but let us fall into the hand of Yahweh, who is very pitiful, rather than into the hand of men!" So he chose the plague, which men could neither aggravate nor lighten, rather than famine or the violence of the foe, for they would both have made him dependent upon men.

The Chronicler gives a somewhat different colouring to the narrative. In accordance with the opinions of his day, he makes Satan instead of Yahweh urge David to take the census; and in describing the appearance of the destroying angel, he seems to have thought of a being visible to the human eye, for he says that Araunah and his sons saw him and went and hid themselves in terror. He further informs us that fire from heaven burned David's sacrifice; and finally he very characteristically tries to excuse the king for not making his sacrifice at Gibeon, where he believes the tabernacle to have stood. He explains this departure from the Law as being due to David's dread of the angel, which was so great as to allow him no time to go to Gibeon. He forgets that he himself has already told us that David went to this threshing-floor of Araunah with the deliberate intention of sacrificing there.

The impression made by the breaking out of this plague during David's census was very deep, but it did not prevent the repetition of a similar measure on several later occasions.

The writer of the book of Origins goes so far as to say that Moses himself held a census, but he tells us that on that occasion every Israelite had to pay a tax of half a shekel to Yahweh "as a propitiation, to prevent the census bringing a plague after it."¹

This peculiar way of looking at things perverted the representations of the old historians throughout, and gives us some idea how deeply superstition was rooted in the Israelite's character. The whole series of events moreover teaches us how the king's power was in many cases checked. His own religious convictions, backed by public opinion and enforced by external events, sometimes made it impossible for him to carry out his will.

It was well for the people that public opinion could make itself so strongly felt. In this special instance, so far from perfectly agreeing with its demands, we cannot but regard them as highly superstitious; but that need not prevent our thinking it a blessing for king and people alike that the will of the nation had such power. Where slavish submission has possession of the people's hearts, all their spirit is soon quenched, and the king himself is revered as a god until at last his tyranny knows no bounds. It was well for Israel, then, that there were men like Gad, "the king's seer," who dared to tell their monarch the truth.

The part here played by Gad was on another occasion taken by Nathan, as the following narrative will show.

In the course of the war with the Ammonites, while Joab was besieging their capital, David, who remained at home, had committed adultery with Bathsheba (properly Bathshua*) the wife of Uriah the Hittite, one of his officers. To conceal the consequences of his sin David sent for Uriah from the

¹ Exodus xxx. 12, 13, 16.

* 1 Chronicles iii. 5.

camp in order that he might visit his home, and that the child to which Bathsheba would give birth might pass for the lawful fruit of her marriage. But Uriah was a warrior at heart, and would not enjoy the pleasures of his home while his fellow soldiers were exposed to all the privations of the field. He chose rather to spend the night in the porch of the palace, although the king had sent some dishes from the royal table for his evening's entertainment at home. On the second day he did the same, though David had asked him to his own table and had made him drunk. David saw that his plan had failed, and began to fear the vengeance of his subject should his shameful abuse of his absence come to light ; so he treacherously ordered Joab to put Uriah in command at some post of danger, and when the Ammonites made a sally to desert him and leave him to perish at their hands. Joab obeyed his orders, and Uriah, with certain of his followers, perished. A messenger was at once dispatched to take the news of this reverse to David. He told him that in the heat of the battle, when the Ammonites had made a sally, Joab's men had pursued them too far and had come close under the wall within range of the enemies' archers, under whose arrows many of them had fallen. David sprang to his feet in indignation : "What madness," he cried, "to advance so near ! The disaster was sure to follow such a blunder. Had Joab forgotten the fate of Abimelech ? How he died by the hand of a woman who cast a stone upon his head as he stood at the foot of the wall ? Why did he go so near ?" Upon this the messenger, following Joab's orders, simply added, as if filling up the measure of his evil tidings, "And Uriah fell amongst them." David's anger was quenched in a moment. He saw that Joab had deliberately forced the van of his army, with Uriah at its head, too far ; and he said in a tone of quiet encouragement, "Tell Joab not to take this accident too much to heart, for such is the fortune of war. One side

suffers a reverse to-day and the other to-morrow. Let him do his best to make a breach ; and then storm the city."

When the time of mourning was over Uriah's widow was taken into David's harem, where she gave birth in course of time to a son.

There were but few who knew with certainty what had taken place, and these few might be trusted not to betray their master. But before long the truth began to be guessed, and an evil smile would play upon the lips of those who were ill-disposed to David as they whispered to one another about the probable connection of this with that. Amongst the Canaanites, the partisans of Saul and the enemies of Yahweh—a term under which the prophets included all opponents of Yahweh's anointed—there were some who took a wicked delight in the shameful deed. David an adulterer and a murderer ! So this was the chosen servant of the god who made so much of moral purity ! The zealots of Yahweh were all the more deeply saddened. Everyone who took an earnest view of life was full of indignation. And David ? Had he no pang of conscience ?

If his royal life had already so far corrupted him that he imagined such a sin could be committed with impunity, it was well for him that a Nathan stood at his side to shake him from his moral torpor. This bold prophet felt himself called upon by Yahweh to bring home the monarch's sin to him ; and, with a fine perception of the nature of his task, he strove to touch his heart. He came into the royal presence, as if on quite other business, and said : " A shameful deed has been done, O king ! and I come to ask your help in punishing the offender. Listen to the tale : There were two men dwelling in one city, one of whom was rich and the other poor. The rich man had very great flocks and herds ; but the poor man had only one little lamb that he had bought ; and he loved it tenderly. He nourished it with gentle care,

and it grew up with him and with his children. It ate of his food; it drank out of his cup; it slept in his bosom, and was like a daughter to him. Now it happened that the rich man had a guest to entertain; and instead of taking one of his own sheep or oxen, and preparing it to set before the traveller, he took away the poor man's little lamb, and ordered that it should be dressed for his table." Hardly had the prophet ceased when David, boiling with indignation, cried, "As sure as Yahweh lives the man deserves to die! He shall render back four-fold what he has stolen; for he was cruel and had no pity!" There stood the king before the seer, glowing with anger at the supposed offence; but Nathan, turning full upon him, cried with passionate earnestness, "Thou art the man! It was of you I spoke as the rich man that robbed his humble neighbour. I have anointed you king of Israel, says Yahweh, and delivered you from the hand of Saul. Your wives are many even now, and if you wanted more you might have had your choice amongst the maids of Israel.¹ And if all this had not sufficed I would have added more besides. Why have you scattered Yahweh's commandments to the winds? You have murdered Uriah the Hittite, and taken his wife to yourself! It was your doing that Uriah fell by the sword of Ammon, and of a truth your house shall ever be a prey to trouble and dissension for this cause! Another shall seize your wives. You did your deed of shame in secret, but Yahweh shall chastise you openly!" The prophet's voice was firm, and indignation flashed from his eye; but David's cheek was pale and his heart oppressed. He stepped back, half doubting whether to launch his wrath against the audacious prophet or to bow down his head in shame for the sin he had committed. The prophet awaited in suspense the answer of his monarch. At last David's better

¹ After an amended version.

nature gained the mastery. He felt his own baseness and humbly confessed his guilt. "I have sinned against Yahweh," he said; and the prophet, softened by his confession of his crime, replied, "Then Yahweh will so far forgive your sin as not to destroy you for it. But inasmuch as you have given his enemies so great occasion to blaspheme, your new-born child shall doubtless perish." With these words Nathan left the royal presence.

It was not long before the little child grew dangerously ill, and David could not but perceive the avenging hand of Yahweh in his sickness. And yet he could not bear to think that he must really lose his child, so he strove to move his god by prayer. All night long he sat upon the ground in his inner chamber, fasting; and his attendants strove in vain to persuade him to rise up and eat. The sickness of the child lasted for seven days, and then it died. But the courtiers dare not tell their master that the end had come, for they said, "When the child was yet alive his grief was past control. What then will it be when he hears that it is dead?" But David saw that they were whispering to one another, and asked "What is it, then? Is the child dead?" Then, though they hardly dared to say the word, they were obliged to answer "Yes!" No sooner had David heard their news than he rose from the ground at once and, to their utter amazement, washed and anointed himself, put on fresh clothes, went to the house of Yahweh to worship, and then had a meal prepared for him in his own palace. His friends were so much surprised by this unusual behaviour that they could not conceal their wonder from the king himself. He read their thoughts, and, indeed, in answer to his questions, they told him plainly that they could not understand why he had mourned and fasted while the child was living, but had taken comfort and been ready to eat as soon as he heard that it was dead. But David told them what it

meant. "When the child was yet alive," he said, "I fasted and prayed, for I thought: It may be that Yahweh will have pity on me and will spare my child! But now that he is dead wherefore should I fast? Can it bring him back to me? I shall go to him, in the world below, but he will not come back to me."

After a time Bathsheba gave birth to another son. This was the celebrated Solomon, "whom Yahweh loved." When the child grew up David committed his education to Nathan the prophet, and at the command of Yahweh named him *Jedidiah*, that is, "loved of Yahweh."¹

The touching account of David's conduct during the sickness and at the death of his child awakes our deepest sympathy, in spite of the superstitious character of the beliefs which it implies throughout. David supposed that his child's sickness was expressly sent by Yahweh as a punishment for his sin, and that by prayer and fasting he might propitiate the offended deity and turn him from his purpose; and his words on hearing of the death of the child—"Why should I fast any more? It no longer avails me anything"—show that he held his beliefs with a naive simplicity and directness which not only startle us now, but were regarded with wonder even by his own contemporaries. We should observe, however, that David went immediately to Yahweh's house to pray, and only gave up the special form of adoration the specific purpose of which was no longer attainable. When we remember that in David's time a father's sin was as distinctly recognised as the cause of a child's disease, as bad drainage, for instance, is in our own, and that prayer and fasting were as normal a means of cure as the physician's art, we may translate the meaning of David's conduct thus: We must do all that lies in our power to preserve those who are committed to our care from disease and death, but if our

¹ After an amended version.

efforts are unavailing we must acquiesce in God's will and must still worship him. Observe also that a prince who had a host of wives and a corresponding number of children was not likely, as a rule, to take it very much to heart, if any of the latter died. All the ties of natural affection are loosened by polygamy. So David's seven days' fast for the sake of the child upon whom he believed his own guilt to have brought disease is a proof of a tender conscience and a gentle heart. The writer of the story himself believed that the avenging hand of Yahweh might be seen in the death of Bathsheba's first-born child; and this leads us to suspect that Nathan's prophetic announcement of the event is a later addition. It is not likely that the prophet did more than add a general threat of punishment to his denunciation of David's sin; unless indeed the child was sick already when he came into the royal presence. In this case he may easily have taught the king to see the avenging hand of Yahweh in the infant's sickness.

Happy the prince whom absolute power has not yet corrupted utterly, whose conscience, even if it sleep, can yet be roused again! But this implies a people that is not altogether servile, that does not applaud everything the prince may do, or regard him absolutely as the representative of the deity, whom no man may resist. Happy the prince who has at least some subjects such as Gad and Nathan! His power may be limited by no written law, but for his own and his people's good it is more or less completely laid under moral restraints.

All honour to the men in whom their monarch's sins stirred such indignant grief that they felt compelled to lay his trespasses before him! All honour to the men who dared to stand up and reprove the anointed of Yahweh! Such heroes are the salt of their land.

CHAPTER V.

INTRIGUES AT COURT AND CIVIL DISSENSIONS.

2 SAMUEL XIII.—XX.

WE may well believe that the life led at an Eastern court gave occasion to every kind of immorality and resultant misery. The troops of women who lived there in luxury and idleness had nothing better to do than to devise new means of currying favour with their royal spouse for their own advantage or that of their children. All the concubines were proud on the one hand of the distinction of living in the royal harem, and jealous on the other hand of the queens; so they devoted themselves entirely to adorning their persons and begging the favour and assistance of the keepers of the harem. These keepers, again, who spent their whole lives amid scenes of pampered indulgence, were generally perfect slaves to their appetites, were quarrelsome and mean-spirited, and cringed before their royal master. And the princes of the blood held their own courts and harems in imitation of the king, and, having nothing better to do, quarrelled over questions of precedence and dignity, and vied with each other in display; while all the courtiers, members of the royal house, officers of state, royal guests, and others, spent their whole time in hunting and in feasting. The royal feasts generally ended in a drinking bout, at which most of the guests were intoxicated;¹ and as long as the princes did not begin their carouse in the morning,² no one saw much harm in it. Again, what a degrading influence must have been exercised upon the life of the courtiers by the constant dread of a king upon whose caprice they were all absolutely dependent! Taking everything together it is hardly too much to

¹ After an amended version of Genesis xliii. 34; see also 2 Samuel xi. 13.

² Ecclesiastes x. 16.

say that it was next to impossible for any man to live a noble life amid such surroundings. The frequency of wars had, under these circumstances, at least one advantage; for although a soldier's life is not in itself particularly well calculated to bring out what is good and loveable in men, yet it could not fail to do more good than harm, from a moral point of view, to the frequenters of such a court as we have described. The following story will show us that all these evils were as conspicuous in David's court as in others.

Amnon, the eldest prince of the blood, was consumed by a passion for the beauteous Tamar, the full sister of his half-brother Absalom; but she was inaccessible to him since she lived in the well-guarded palace of the women, in which it was hardly possible for any man except the king to set his foot. But, unhappily for all concerned, Amnon had a friend of the name of Jonadab, the son of one of David's brothers, and a very cunning man. He advised him to pretend that he was ill, and ask his father whether Tamar might come to prepare some food for him. In this way he would get her into his power. The plot succeeded only too well; but Amnon's passions were as fickle as they were violent, and no sooner had he accomplished his wicked purpose than his love was turned to hatred, and he doubled the wrong that he had done to Tamar by refusing to marry when he had dishonoured her. Not knowing what to do, she took refuge with her brother Absalom, who offered a few careless words of comfort, and let neither her nor anyone else see what was going on within him; but, nevertheless, his thoughts were set upon a fierce revenge. David was very angry when he heard of what had happened, but he was too weak to punish Amnon, his eldest son, of whom he was very fond. So Absalom felt all the more keenly that the right and duty of taking vengeance fell to him.

For two whole years he kept his anger secret. Then he

saw that his time was come. The whole affair was now almost forgotten, for princes are seldom reminded of their sins at court. Amnon was therefore all the more likely to fall into the snare that his brother was laying for him. It was the time of sheep-shearing, and Absalom took the opportunity of giving a great feast, to which he asked his father. David declined, for fear of putting his son to too much expense. Absalom then asked whether Amnon might not come to his feast, that the occasion might at least be graced by the presence of the heir-apparent, if the king himself could not come. David, who may have had his own suspicions, refused even this at first, but finally gave his consent. So Amnon fell into the power of the brother he had wronged. Suspecting no evil he came, with a small retinue, to Absalom's country place at Baal-Hazor, in the north-west of Judah. The sacrifices were offered and the merrymaking began, but at the close of the feast, when Amnon was more or less intoxicated, and his attendants had feasted too well to be able to defend him, the servants of Absalom set upon him and slew him. Absalom himself immediately took to flight, and the other princes fled in terror and confusion to Jerusalem, not knowing whether they too were to be attacked or no.

Rumour had already reported the event, with as much exaggeration as usual, at the palace. "Absalom has murdered all the king's sons" it was said. The ready credence which this story gained, though entirely unconfirmed, proves the frequency of such deeds of violence and death in those days; and people whose intellectual nature is not highly developed, and who act on the impulse of their passions and emotions, rather than the dictates of calm reflection, are always apt to be completely carried away by good or bad tidings. "All the king's sons are murdered, not one has escaped!" was the cry raised by David's attendants, and, though nobody really knew anything about it, the report was

generally believed. David, himself, the very picture of misery, sat upon the ground with his garments rent, utterly confounded and broken down. His courtiers surrounded him, rending their garments and uttering cries of woe. There was but one man present who kept his head and guessed the truth. It was Amnon's friend, the wily Jonadab. He knew enough of human nature to feel certain that Absalom had never forgiven his brother for his treatment of Tamar, and he thought it probable that he had now taken his revenge. "Lament not for all your sons, O king," he cried, "for surely it is Amnon alone who has perished. From the day on which he dishonoured Tamar we might have known that Absalom would plot against his life. You need not be so ready to believe that all the princes are slain, for you will see that it is only Amnon." It soon appeared that his conjecture was well founded. The sentinel on the watch-tower announced the approach of a great company from the west. "See now!" said Jonadab, "they are the king's sons!" Before long the fact was placed above all doubt. The princes rushed in, like fugitives, and confirmed the terrible report as far as Amnon was concerned, but no further. Upon this the king and all his courtiers burst into a loud cry of lamentation over the death of the heir to the throne.

Meanwhile Absalom had fled to the court of the king of Geshur, for his mother, Maachah, was the daughter of the late king of this district.¹ He was well received, and remained three years in the country. At first his father demanded his surrender, and he was in some danger; but it seems that the king of the Geshurites, though he had been subdued by David, was still sufficiently independent to protect the fugitive. And when the time of mourning for Amnon's death was over David's anger gradually abated, until at last he even longed to see Absalom again. We might well suppose

¹ 2 Samuel iii. 3.

that under these circumstances the prince's banishment would come to an end; for if his royal father desired his return, what was to prevent his exchanging the court of Geshur for that of Jerusalem? But there was one formidable obstacle in the way—the will of Yahweh, maintained by the prophets and revered by the people. “Whoso sheds the blood of man, his blood must be shed. The blood-redeemer must slay him, lest Yahweh be not appeased and a curse come upon the land.” This terrible commandment made Absalom's return impossible; for even a king, impelled by his love for his own son, dare not so utterly defy public opinion as to fling to the winds a commandment considered sacred by the people. It is true that the religious revival of Samuel's time had already lost much of its strength, but its effects were still too powerfully felt to be ignored with safety.

But there was one man at court who read the king's real wishes in his face, and strove to devise some means of inducing him to give them effect. It was David's faithful general Joab. To compass his object he sent to Tekoa, a place in the desert of Judah, for a certain woman who had the reputation of great sagacity. The two took counsel together; and then the woman went as a suppliant, clothed in mourning garments, before the king, and threw herself down in reverence at his feet. David asked her what her petition was, and she answered: “I am a widow, and I once had two sons; but they quarrelled with each other—out in the fields where there was no one to part them—and at last one of them struck down his brother dead. And now, as if this were not enough, all my family have conspired together to demand that I should ‘give up the murderer who slew his brother,’ that they may put him to death. Alas! my lord, must my husband's heir indeed be slain, and must his name utterly perish?” She ceased. The king and all who were present were touched by the mother's grief; but

David knew how hard it was to prevent the blood-redemption, and, as his thoughts wandered to the court of Geshur, he replied, "Go home, and I will give the needful orders on your behalf." But the woman had not yet gained her object. She was determined to extort from the king a more definite promise to protect her son against those who would put him to death in Yahweh's name. So she pretended to fear that the king was running too great a risk for her sake in protecting her son against the zealots. "My lord the king!" she exclaimed, "better that my family should perish than that your throne should be imperilled." David's pride was now touched, and he answered haughtily, "Bring anyone before me who dares to dispute my sentence, and I promise he shall never raise so much as a finger against you!" Everything was going as it should; one more successful move and the woman had won the game! "O my king!" she cried beseechingly, "confirm your promise with an oath that the blood-redeemer shall not be suffered to increase my woes yet more!" The king was touched by the grief expressed in the mother's prayer; he read in the faces of his courtiers sympathetic pity for her sorrow, and, complying with her last request, he swore, "As sure as Yahweh lives, not a hair of your son's head shall be touched!"

The suppliant now commanded the position. On hearing the king's oath, she was silent a moment, and then quietly added, "May I say one other word to my lord the king?" There was something in her manner that especially excited David's interest, and he gave her permission to speak. A sudden change came over her as she cried, "You stand condemned by your own oath, O king! until you have recalled your banished son. For, behold, we must all die one day, and can never be recalled to life, any more than water that is poured upon the ground can be gathered up again. Yet God does not slay the murderer, but mercifully refrains

from utterly rejecting him in spite of his sin. And now, O king, I have come to you because the people terrified me, and I thought 'the king will protect me against all who seek to root out my family from Yahweh's heritage; his promise will set me at peace, for the king is like an angel of God in distinguishing between good and evil.' May Yahweh bless you!"

The woman had indeed deep knowledge of human nature. She had raised a protest in the king's conscience, and that of all who surrounded him, against the savage law that condemned the murderer to death; and at the same time had reminded David of his own power. Who would dare to dispute what he determined?

David felt that he must yield, but knew that the woman would not have ventured on so bold an appeal of her own accord. So he said to her, "And now do you, in your turn, tell me: Had not Joab a hand in this?" Upon which she cried, "O my lord the king, when you speak you always hit the mark. Yes, it was Joab who put all these words into my mouth, and told me to lay the matter thus before you. But my lord the king sees everything like an angel of God, he knows all that is done in the whole land."

Then David turned to Joab and said, "I will fulfil your wish. Go and bring Absalom back." Rejoicing in the success of his stratagem, Joab bowed down in reverence before the king, and, as if he had received a personal favour himself, exclaimed, "Now I know that I have found grace in your eyes, because you have listened to the words of your servant."

So Absalom returned to Jerusalem, but the king forbade him to appear at court. He was too much attached to him to leave him in exile, and perhaps he thought it just as well to keep his probable successor under his eye, but he dare not behave as though nothing had happened for fear of incurring the displeasure of the prophets; so he still treated his son

more or less as an offender. But like most half measures, this conduct was very unwise and satisfied no one. The zealots of Yahweh were naturally far from content and so was Joab on the other side. Absalom himself became impatient under his humiliation. He endured this half exile for two years, but then it became so intolerable to him that he sent for his former champion, Joab, to devise some means of putting an end to it. But Joab knew very well why he was sent for, and since he was unwilling on the one hand to refuse Absalom's request, but afraid on the other to speak again on his behalf to the king, he adopted the simple course of not going, even when invited a second time. But Absalom was determined to have an interview with him, and as he could not compass his end by fair means, he did not shrink from foul. Joab had a field of barley bordering on Absalom's estate, and the latter ordered his servants to set the crop on fire. Joab came to demand an explanation, and the prince openly declared that he had done it in order to secure an interview. He wanted to ask him to speak to his father on his behalf, for he could not endure this unnatural state of things any longer. If it was to last, it was a pity he had ever come out of Geshur. The king must either completely forgive him, and recall him to court, or else bring him to justice for his crime.

Joab allowed himself to be persuaded and undertook the dangerous task of conveying Absalom's message to the king. The result was what he wished. David forgave his son, and when he appeared at court received him with the kiss of favour.

David's second son, Chileab,¹ seems to have died early; and after Amnon's death Absalom was the eldest of the princes, and therefore the probable successor to the throne.

¹ 2 Samuel iii. 3.

There was also much in his person to recommend him. We have observed more than once that the Israelites had not reached so high a stage of moral development as not to be led away by appearances, and to attach great importance to personal beauty and a commanding presence. Now, Absalom was wonderfully beautiful. Tall and upright in stature and perfect in figure from head to foot. His luxuriant locks flowed down in long ringlets over his shoulders. Once a year, when his hair grew oppressively heavy, he had it cut, and the severed locks weighed, we are told, three hundred shekels, royal weight. That would be about six and a half pounds avoirdupois, which is quite impossible. There must be a mistake in the figure; but the only essential point is that Absalom's hair was remarkably abundant. As soon as he was received into his father's favour, he did all he could to ingratiate himself with the people. He held a magnificent court, and constantly drove out in an equipage of princely splendour, preceded by fifty guards. Sometimes he would take his stand with all his retinue at one of the city gates; and when any distinguished stranger approached the city to appeal to the king, as supreme judge, he would enter into conversation with him, and inquire, with a great appearance of interest, whence he came and what brought him to the king. On this the stranger, full of reverence for any scion of royalty, would tell him all about his affairs. Then Absalom would give him a friendly answer. No doubt he was perfectly right, he would say, his cause was a thoroughly good one; but at the same time he would shrug his shoulders and add a few broken sentences in a sympathetic, half-apologetic tone: "You ask for nothing but what is just and right, and yet I hardly know what to say to it. My father is an excellent man, no doubt, but—have you anyone to make interest with him for you?—have you brought the means of securing the courtiers? If not, why—I almost fear—

you see it does not always go for much to have justice on your side. It is very sad. Well! I only wish I could sit in judgment! Things would go differently then." As the stranger, taking leave of the prince, bowed down in reverence Absalom would run up to him, give him his hand, raise him from the ground, and embrace him. Thus did he steal the hearts of the Israelites. Such kindness and condescension on the part of one so distinguished, wealthy, and beautiful had an irresistible charm.

After thus preparing his way to the throne for four years,¹ Absalom thought the time had come for him to displace his father. He may have had reason to fear that if he remained quiet David would name Solomon or Adonijah as his successor. So he declared that he had to go to Hebron to pay a vow to Yahweh, which he had made when he was in Geshur, at least six years ago therefore. David gave his consent, and Absalom started with a magnificent retinue. He had taken his measures skillfully. He had placed his emissaries in every district of the country, and they were ready, as soon as the signal should be given at Hebron, to raise the cry, "Long live King Absalom, crowned at Hebron!" all through the land. In the retinue of the prince were two hundred influential citizens of Jerusalem, who knew nothing of the plot. They accompanied him simply as guests, but he could make them serve as hostages. Ahithophel, on the other hand, one of David's shrewdest advisers, was in the secret. He had withdrawn to Giloh, his birthplace, where his family still resided. Giloh was not far from Hebron, and when Absalom reached the latter city, Ahithophel joined him there, and the prince entered into a solemn league with him and other nobles, while the sacrifices were being offered.²

¹ After an amended version.

After an amended version of 2 Samuel, xv. 12.

All was now ripe for action. At a given sign, in the midst of the sacrificial feast, one of the conspirators, probably a prophet, rose up, advanced to Absalom, poured the oil of consecration over his head, and cried, "Thus says Yahweh, I anoint thee king of Israel!" All the conspirators now rose to their feet, and brandishing their weapons, or striking their spears against their shields, made the vale of Hebron ring to the cry, "Long live King Absalom!" The prince's armed retainers caught up and repeated the shout, till the echo of every hill in the whole country round returned it; and even the men of Jerusalem who had fallen into the trap, were compelled, with the best grace they could assume, to join in the cry. The whole district declared for Absalom. The cry was now "Jerusalem!" and the rebel hastened, at the head of his men, to secure the capital. No sooner had David heard the rumour "Absalom is proclaimed king! All Israel has gone over to him, and the whole country is in rebellion," than he ordered his courtiers to follow him in flight. Pusilanimous as this conduct seems at first, it was in reality very sagacious. Under the special circumstances David was quite at a loss to know whom he could trust. For anything he knew, he might have traitors at his very side, and he could not tell whether the two hundred citizens who had gone with Absalom as guests had been privy to the conspiracy or not; and even if they were simply prisoners, they would at least serve as hostages, and their relations in Jerusalem would never offer a vigorous resistance to the man who held their lives in his hand.

It was a dismal journey for the king. He went out of Jerusalem at the northern side, followed by his courtiers and his wives and children, with their attendants. He only left behind ten of his concubines to take charge of the palace. On the outskirts of the city he paused to see who were following him. Now, he would see what real support he had.

It was a joyful sight to recognise his faithful followers as they passed. First of all came his body-guard, the Krethi and Plethi, followed by a troop of common soldiers; while the rear was brought up by the six hundred "heroes"¹—David's picked band of well-trying veterans, many of whom had followed his flag ever since the days when he dwelt at Ziklag. It was with no small surprise that the king noticed amongst his followers Ittai the Gittite. This man was probably one of the Philistine nobles who were retained at Jerusalem as security for the good behaviour of their countrymen. "Why, what is this?" asked David. "Are you coming with me? Why do you not stay behind with the new king? You are a stranger and a prisoner.² You have been here but a little while, and why should you wander about with me homeless? Go back to your country with your fellow-citizens, and may Yahweh reward your fidelity to me!"³ But Ittai answered, "As Yahweh and the king live, I will follow you in life and death!" So David received him amongst his followers, and said "Come with us, then, if you are so resolved."

But he would not allow the priests to accompany him. They stood at the passage of Kidron, with Zadok and Abiathar at their head, and the ark of the covenant in their midst, waiting till all the fugitives had passed over, and intending to bring up the rear themselves. David did not think it well to take the sacred chest with him. "Take back the ark into the city," he said to the priests, "If Yahweh should graciously vouchsafe to bring me back, I shall see the ark and its house once more; and if he be not gracious to me, I must bear it. Let him do what seems him good." Broken down and afflicted as he was—for the lamentations of the people that witnessed his departure completely overcame him—he had still sufficient presence of mind to attend to

^{1 2 3} After an amended version.

every dictate of prudence. This determination to send back the ark was really nothing but a device for keeping his faithful friends the priests in Jerusalem. "Go back,"¹ he said to Zadok, "and enter the city in peace; and let your son Ahimaaz, and Abiathar's son Jonathan, bring me news of all that happens in Jerusalem. I shall stay in the wilderness of Jericho until I hear from you."

To this wilderness David and his followers now turned their steps. Though consoled by the fidelity of many friends, the king was deeply troubled. With muffled head and naked feet he pursued his way over the Mount of Olives weeping. His faithful followers accompanied him with lamentations and signs of woe. In time of need we learn to know our true friends; and David's heart was now saddened and rejoiced alternately by the conduct of the men who had been at his side in the time of his prosperity. The defection of the wily Ahithophel was heavy news, and David cried on hearing it, "O Yahwéh! turn the counsel of Ahithophel to folly!" But Hushai, "his friend," that is to say his private adviser or grand vizier, came to meet him in mourning garments, and offered to accompany him in his flight. His fidelity was something to set against Ahithophel's defection, but David would not let him accompany him, since his presence would hinder rather than help him in his flight. So he told him to pretend to embrace the cause of Absalom, and attempt to counteract the advice of Ahithophel. He could then advise him, by means of the faithful priests, of Absalom's plans. Hushai cheerfully undertook the dangerous task, and returned to Jerusalem.

Hardly had David parted from him when another came to meet him. It was Ziba, the steward of Meribaal. He was driving before him a couple of asses bearing pack-saddles laden with bread, bunches of raisins, cakes of dried fruit, and

¹ After an amended version.

wine. All these he offered to the king. "Where is your master?" said David. "He is staying behind in Jerusalem," was the reply; "for he says that perhaps the Israelites will make him king now." Upon this David cried in a sudden burst of anger, "Then I give all his property to you!" Ziba bowed down to the ground in grateful acknowledgment of so rich a grant.

This circumstance could hardly fail to turn David's thoughts to his predecessor, and to arouse associations which must have been particularly painful at such a moment. But the lot of Saul's descendants and his own conduct towards them were soon to be brought to his memory in a far more distressing way. As they were passing by Bahurim, there suddenly appeared a man running towards them, who openly exulted in the king's misfortunes. It was a certain Shimei, a member of the house of Saul. "May Yahweh's curse rest on you, murderer!" he shrieked at David; and, as he ran by the side of the fugitives, keeping at some distance from them, he went on shouting again and again, "Murderer! murderer! This is your reward for slaying those seven victims of your hate. Think of the sons of Merab! Have you forgotten Rizpah? Of course it was all the Gibeonites, and you had nothing to do with it, you son of Belial! And who murdered Abner? Was it Joab? Did you know nothing of it? Have you punished Zeruiah's son? Abner's blood has come upon you now. Yahweh is paying you your deserts by the hand of Absalom, your own flesh and blood! Murderer! murderer!" As Shimei went on railing against David, flinging dust into the air in his frenzy and hurling stones at the king, Abishai, Joab's brother, burst out passionately, "Shall that lump of carrion curse my lord the king? Let me go and strike his head off!" But David was smitten to the heart, and would not give him leave. So many painful memories had risen in

his breast. His conscience was uneasy, and the thought that his present misery was an atonement for the past came home to him. "Let me hear no more of you, you sons of Zeruiah!" he said to Abishai. "Doubtless it is Yahweh who has told him to curse me; and why should I be angry with him?" Then he turned to those immediately about him and exclaimed, "See, now! my own son is conspiring against my life. Is it strange that this Benjamite should act as he does? Let him curse me, then, for Yahweh has doubtless sent him, and will all the sooner look upon my misery and requite me with joy for this my sorrow!" So David's heroes let Shimei go on, and—like the ass in the fable that kicks the dying lion—he accompanied the king, with curses and every other expression of hatred, to Ajephim,¹ that is, *the place of the wearied*. Here David and his companions halted to take breath.

Meanwhile, Absalom and his fellow-conspirators had reached Jerusalem, where Hushai met them with the greeting, "Long life to King Absalom!" Full of amazement, the prince inquired, "What does this mean? You, the king's friend, here! Did you not fly with my father, then?" "I did not," answered the wily minister, "I am the servant of the man, whoever he may be, whom Yahweh and these citizens and all Israel have chosen. I am true to him. And besides, whom should I serve rather than my master's son? As I have stood by your father's side, so will I henceforth stand by yours."

At the suggestion of Ahithophel, whose word was received as an oracle, Absalom immediately took to himself the king's concubines who had been left behind, in order to make the breach between himself and his father irreparable, and to convince his followers that they must either conquer or die. After this a council of war was held at once to decide upon the next step. Ahithophel proposed an excellent plan. He

¹ After an amended version.

himself, at the head of twelve thousand men, would pursue David that very night. In all probability he would find him, wearied and dejected, in the wilderness of Jericho; where it would be easy to disperse his followers and slay no one but him. "Thus," concluded Ahithophel, "I will bring round the whole people to you, as a bride is brought to her husband. And the whole people will be blessed, while one man only loses his life."¹ All the elders who had sided with Absalom approved of this advice, and the prince himself had nothing to say against it. But unluckily for him he thought of asking Hushai's advice. Hushai saw the excellence of Ahithophel's plan as soon as he was informed of it, and consequently did his best to dissuade Absalom from following it. "This time," he said, when appealed to, "this once, O king, Ahithophel has given bad advice! You know your father and the men he has about him. They are warriors fierce as a bear robbed of her young on the plain, or a wild boar raging through the glen.^a Your father knows what war means but too well, and will never let his people spend the night unguarded. Now suppose he has concealed himself in some cave or hole, and suddenly makes a sally on a detachment of your troops. Very likely he might succeed in slaying some few of them, and if he did, report would immediately exaggerate the exploit prodigiously. You know the way of the world. If once it were reported, 'David has defeated the followers of Absalom,' a heart as brave as a lion's would sink with fear; for all Israel knows your father's valour, and knows what heroes his faithful followers are. But I can tell you of a better plan. Call out all Israel to battle—countless as the sands on the sea shore—and march at the head yourself. Then, wherever he has stationed himself, we shall fall upon him, troop upon troop, as the dew falls upon the earth, and not one of his followers will escape. Or if he seeks refuge in a city, then all

¹ After an amended version.

Israel will be like a net spread round the fortress, and we shall overturn it till there is not one stone left upon another." Such a scheme, proposed in terms of bombastic oratory, had much to attract such a man as Absalom. His followers, too, were dazzled by the brilliant prospect; and Hushai's advice, which seemed so much more prudent than Ahithophel's, was followed. There could not really have been a greater mistake, for David gained time and Absalom was exposed to all the dangers of the battle-field. The historian, who had no scruple in attributing a falsehood to Yahweh, adds the note, "Yahweh had commanded Hushai to speak thus, that Ahithophel's good advice might come to nought and that Absalom might rush upon his fate." Ahithophel was driven to despair when his advice was neglected, and perhaps he now began to fear that things would go against the rebels, so he retired to his own house, arranged his affairs, and put an end to his life.

Hushai lost no time in sending word to the king, by the sons of the priests, of all that had occurred at Jerusalem. The two bold messengers ran great danger of being caught, but they finally reached David in safety, and gave him an account of Absalom's plans, adding that Hushai advised him to cross the Jordan with all possible speed. The king obeyed, and soon arrived with his followers at Mahanaim, the former residence of Ishbaal. Here he was very generously supplied with all that he required by three distinguished citizens of Mahanaim, Rabbah of the Ammonites, and Lodebar.

Absalom lost no time in raising an army, and was soon able to cross the Jordan and pass through Gilead to Mahanaim. He had appointed Amasa, whose father was an Ishmaelite¹ and whose mother was related to David, as his general. Meanwhile David himself had not been idle, but

¹ After an amended version of 2 Samuel xvii. 25. See 1 Chronicles ii. 17.

had summoned all who were still true to his cause; and when Absalom approached he was quite in a position to meet him. At the advice of his friends he refrained from taking any part in the battle himself, because the death of one of the leaders, especially since it was a civil war, was so likely to decide the whole contest; or as David's advisers expressed it: "Suppose we were put to flight; nay, suppose one-half of us were slain, it would not signify. But your life is worth more than ten thousand of ours." So David remained in the city with the reserve, while his troops went out, in three divisions, under Joab, Abishai, and Ittai the Gittite, to meet Absalom.

As David stood at the gate of Mahanaim, and saw his troops pass by, the hope and desire of victory could not banish from his heart an anxious care for his son's safety. What if some mishap should befall him in the battle? "Deal gently with the boy! Spare Absalom!" he cried to his generals, in the hearing of all the people. But the commanders were far from sharing David's tenderness towards the rebel, and had their own ideas about the proper way of treating him, as we shall presently see.

The battle was fought at a considerable distance from the city, and Absalom was defeated. Twenty thousand of his men fell on the field, and still more were lost in the neighbouring forest, where they died of hunger, or were drowned in morasses. Absalom himself, seated on the royal mule, took to flight; but, as he was passing under the thick branches of an oak tree, his hair was caught by them. His beast sprang from under him, and he was left there swinging between heaven and earth. In this condition he was seen by one of David's soldiers, who immediately told Joab. The general would doubtless have been glad had Absalom been dispatched without his knowledge. "Why did you not strike him dead?" he asked. "I would have given you ten shekels of silver and a splendid girdle if you had." But the man

replied, "If you gave me a hundred times as much I would not lay a hand on the prince, no not for all the money in the world; for we all heard the king telling you and Abishai and Ittai to spare his life. And if I had slain him never so secretly, yet the king finds out everything, and you would have turned against me yourself." What the soldier said was true enough; but in case of need Joab did not shrink from taking the responsibility of the deed upon his own shoulders, though he would have preferred that it should rest on others. Without another word he hastened to the spot pointed out by the soldier, and hurled three javelins into Absalom's body, after which his ten squires finally dispatched him.

There was now no need to pursue the enemy further, so Joab recalled and assembled his troops by sound of trumpet. Absalom's body was thrown into a hole and covered with a great heap of stones. How different was this monument from the one in the King's Valley, not far from Jerusalem, apparently, still known as "Absalom's monument" centuries afterwards! This was a great column that Absalom had raised in his own honour because he had no sons—the three that he once had¹ having died young apparently.

Joab had still one task of difficulty left; he had to inform the king of what had occurred. There were messengers enough ready to take the news of the victory, but what would the king say to Absalom's death? "May I bear news to the king of Yahweh's judgment on his foes?" asked Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok. "You shall not be the bearer of this day's news," answered Joab, "for the tidings are bad, seeing that the king's son is dead." He knew well enough that the bearer of bad news had seldom to expect a good reception, and he was too much attached to Ahimaaz to be willing to expose him to David's wrath. So he turned to a certain Ethiopian, whom he had less scruple in exposing

¹ 2 Samuel xiv. 27.

to danger, and said to him, "Go you and tell the king all that you have seen!" The man bowed down in token of obedience, and at once set off. But Ahimaaz, who knew very well why Joab had not chosen him as his messenger, was quite equal to avoiding the dangers his friend feared on his behalf, so he persisted in begging to be allowed to go in addition to the other messenger, and at last Joab consented. Ahimaaz knew the shortest way to Mahanaim, and reached it before the other. The king was sitting waiting at the entrance of the city, when the watchman, stationed on the roof of the gateway, saw Ahimaaz approaching and the Ethiopian following at a little distance behind him. "They must be messengers!" said David. As soon as the son of Zadok was recognised the king and those about him anticipated good news, for what else could such a friend as Ahimaaz bear! So they awaited his approach with confidence, and as soon as he came into the royal presence he threw himself upon the ground and cried "Long life to the king! Blessed be Yahweh your god, who has quelled the pride of those who raised up their hands against you." "And my son?" said the king anxiously. But the wary messenger, who saw the Ethiopian drawing near, had already delivered the good news, and determined to leave the bad to his fellow. So he replied, "There was a great hubbub when Joab despatched this servant of the king and myself, but I cannot tell what it was about." So the second messenger had to supplement his story; and when the king asked about Absalom, he answered bluntly: "May every one that rises up against my lord the king perish as he has perished!"

On hearing these tidings the king sprang to his feet in a burst of uncontrollable grief, withdrew to the chamber above the gate, and paced up and down crying aloud, "O, my son Absalom! My darling child! Would that I had died for you! O, Absalom, my own dear son!"

David's grief was altogether natural, though, strictly speaking, his conduct had been weak and half-hearted. When he found Absalom a rebel, he had really no choice but either to forget his royal dignity and duty, and yield the crown to his son, or to set aside all paternal tenderness and wage war against his rebellious subject. As it was he tried to take a middle course. Knowing the chances of war perfectly well, he deliberately sent an army into the field against his son, yet without making up his mind to lose him, and gave such orders to his generals that obedience would have gone far towards making the whole victory futile, while disobedience plunged him into an agony of grief. To us this inconsistency seems very natural, and we can well understand that, although David had deliberately determined to wage war against Absalom, yet when the battle was over, the king, rejoicing in the fall of his foe, was lost in the father weeping the death of his son. But it is not to be wondered at that David's faithful followers had little sympathy with his grief. Instead of entering Mahanaim, with shouts of victory and pealing trumpets, the army was compelled to creep in silence into the city, as though it had suffered a defeat; for the soldiers could hardly celebrate a triumph while the king was mourning. But the victors thought it hard, and many a murmur was heard against the king. It was the faithful Joab once more who ventured to point out to him what serious consequences might result from his conduct. He acquitted himself of his task in his usual rough style. "You are making all your followers," he said, "ashamed of having rescued you and all that is dear to you from destruction! What could be more outrageous than your love for your enemies and your hatred of your friends? I suppose you would take it less to heart if you lost everyone of your faithful soldiers and officers? If anyone had brought you word to-day that we were all dead, but that Absalom was spared,

I know you would have thought the news good. Now, mark my words ! Unless you go at once to speak to the soldiers and thank them, by Yahweh they will all disperse before evening, and that would leave you in a worse plight than you have ever been in in your life." David could not help recognising the truth of Joab's words, and accordingly he followed his advice.

Now that Absalom was dead, David could return to Jerusalem. Indeed he could evidently recover his throne without striking another blow. For those who urged on Absalom in his course, and still more all those who had been carried away by the rebellion, half against their will, now repented of the part they had taken. After all, they thought, it was David who had rescued Israel from the hand of the Philistines and every other foe. So all the tribes began to make preparations for escorting him solemnly to Jerusalem. Representatives of the different parts of the country were to meet for this purpose by the Jordan. But the priests Zadok and Abiathar could not quietly await the issue, and endeavoured to hasten David's return. At his command they entered into negotiations with the men of Judah, urging them to anticipate the chiefs of the other tribes, and be the first to bring back the king, who was their own tribesman. They also secured the help of Amasa, Absalom's general, by conveying to him David's promise, made under oath, that since he was the king's relative, he should be made commander-in-chief in Joab's place. All these secret negotiations had the desired effect. The men of Judah assembled at Gilgal, by the fords of the Jordan, to escort David back to Jerusalem. While the king was still on the eastern side of the river, Shimei, the Benjamite, who had cursed him as he fled from Absalom, came to meet him, with a thousand of his fellow-tribesmen, amongst whom was Ziba, Saul's former steward, with all his children and dependants. Shimei implored the

king's forgiveness, and strove to secure his favour by reminding him that he was the first of all the house of Joseph to come and escort him home. No doubt this fact had great weight with David, and, far from listening to Abishai, who would have taken Shimei's life, because he had cursed Yahweh's anointed, he promised the suppliant, under an oath, that he would not injure him.

But now a complaint was brought against one of Shimei's companions—Ziba—by Jonathan's son, Meribaal. He had come from¹ Jerusalem to meet the king, and when asked why he had not accompanied him in his flight he threw the blame upon the treachery of his servant, who had taken advantage of his helpless condition to leave him in the lurch. Instead of getting a beast for his crippled master to ride on, as he had been ordered to do, he left him in fruitless expectation and went and calumniated him to the king! Meribaal's outward appearance vouched for the truth of this assertion, for he had never washed his feet, put on clean clothes, or trimmed his beard since David left the city. So David could hardly do less than recall his former hasty sentence, and restore Meribaal's affairs to their old footing. Ziba was still to see to his estates, and the two were to live on the produce.

When David had crossed the Jordan he had to take leave of Barzillai, an old man of eighty years, who had been his host at Mahanaim. In vain he tried to persuade him to accompany him to the capital. The aged man declared that he had no wish to do so, since the pleasures of the court had no attraction for one of his years; but he recommended his son Chimham to the royal favour.*

David's Judæan and Benjamite escort had not accompanied him far upon his way before he began to reap the fruits of his folly in entering into secret negotiations with the men

¹ After an amended version.

of Judah, and with Amasa. For the representatives of the northern tribes were much dissatisfied with the conduct of the Judæans. Did not they constitute ten parts of the king's subjects and the Judæans only one? Surely they ought to have shared the honour of escorting him home. It was in vain that the Judæans tried to pacify them by saying, "But what does it all matter? Do you suppose we have sat at the king's table or received a present from him?" The jealous Israelites, who really only recognised David as king because they had no one to put in his place, gave a ready ear to the counsel of a certain Benjamite—Sheba, the son of Bichri—and refused to accompany the king to Jerusalem.

David's promise to make Amasa commander-in-chief was an act of still greater folly than his secret negotiations with Judah. This follower of Absalom was by no means highly thought of just now, especially amongst the warriors who had defeated him under Joab's lead. David soon became painfully aware of this, for when he reached Jerusalem he at once ordered Amasa to take the field against Sheba within three days; but the new general found his utmost endeavours fruitless. The men of military age refused to take up arms; and even the picked troops, who were always ready for action, declined to follow Amasa's standard. David was at a loss what to do. He knew very well that if he gave the insurgents a little time, it would be no easy task to put them down. So there was nothing for it but to turn once more to the hated, but indispensable Joab. Hardly had the old general received orders to collect an army before the thing was done. His own newly-raised regiment, the Krethi and Plethi, and the select troops already under arms, marched at once from Jerusalem to quell the revolt of Sheba. At Gibeon they met Amasa, who was making his way to Jerusalem, at the head of the few troops he had managed to draw together. Joab was not the man to stick at a murder. He

himself was secured by his armour from a surprise, so he advanced with a friendly greeting to Amasa, and, as he embraced him, plunged the sword that he grasped in his left hand into his body. Then he turned to the followers of the murdered general and invited them to join his army, which they were quite willing to do, as soon as Amasa's body had been hastily removed. Then Joab, with united forces, turned upon Sheba.

Sheba had withdrawn himself to the extreme north of the land, to Abel Beth Maachah,¹ and accordingly Joab laid siege to the city with the flower² of Israel's troops. The wall was already undermined, and a breach had been effected at more points than one. The fortress would inevitably have been carried by storm had not the sagacity of a certain woman saved it. She begged an interview with Joab, and reminded him that the city had long been renowned as a seat of wisdom,—whether for an oracle established there or for the penetration of its inhabitants does not appear,—that it was one of the chief places of Israel, and that every friend of the fatherland would lament its fall. Why should Yahweh's heritage be devastated? Joab declared himself ready to put an end to hostilities as soon as Sheba's head was thrown over the wall to him. The woman promised to comply with this condition, and she kept her word, for she easily persuaded her fellow-townsmen of the necessity of the step. Upon this the troops returned to Jerusalem.

So David was restored to the throne of Israel; and Joab, however much his master hated him, remained in command of his armies. .

¹ Marked A. B. M. on Map III.

² After an amended version.

CHAPTER V.

THE LAST DAYS OF KING DAVID.

1 KINGS I. 1—II. 11.

AFTER Absalom's death, Adonijah was David's eldest surviving son. He therefore expected to succeed his father as king. He was a handsome man, and David, who had never spoken a hard word to him, had let him have his own way in everything. Now when the king's life was evidently drawing to a close, Adonijah assumed the position of the future ruler of Israel more and more openly. As his brother Absalom had done before him, so he, too, established stables on an extensive scale, and surrounded himself by an escort of fifty men. But since he was not certain upon whom his father's choice might light, and perhaps suspected that Solomon, the son of Bathsheba, stood higher in the royal favour than he did himself, he determined to have himself publicly crowned. Of David's chief ministers, Joab and Abiathar took Adonijah's part; whereas Zadok the priest, Benaiah the captain of the body-guard, Nathan the prophet, and Hushai, "the king's friend,"¹ together with the whole of the chosen troops, were against him. In spite of this opposition Adonijah went with his followers to the Fuller's Well, on the south side of Jerusalem, there to celebrate his coronation feast. But the prophet Nathan went to Bathsheba to tell her of what was going on, and advised her to inform the king of it, promising that he himself would try to obtain an interview with him afterwards. The ambitious woman, who had already prevailed upon her husband to swear that her son should be his successor, at once took Nathan's advice. She obtained access to David's chamber, reminded him of his promise, told him what Ado-

¹ After an amended version.

nijah was doing, added in a strain of flattery that all Israel was hanging on his decision, and asked sadly what would be her own fate and that of her son should this revolt be successful. While she was yet speaking, Nathan entered and asked the king whether it was with his consent that Adonijah had ascended the throne, for he had actually been proclaimed king! The aged monarch, could not resist their importunity, and renewed his oath that none but Solomon should be his successor. In order to give effect, if possible, to his wish, he ordered Zadok, Nathan, and Benaiah to conduct Solomon in state, mounted upon his own mule, to the well of Gihon, west of the city, and there to sound the trumpets and anoint him king. When this was done the inhabitants of Jerusalem at once accepted him as their monarch, and raised a deafening shout of joy—so loud, says the historian, that “the earth was rent by it.”

Adonijah's coronation feast was just drawing to a close when the sound of this shout fell upon the ears of the guests. “What is all that shouting for?” asked Joab, suspecting mischief of some sort; and while they were all wondering what it might be, Jonathan, the son of Abiathar, came running out of the city. “Welcome!” cried Adonijah, as he came, “Surely you bring good tidings!” But picture the consternation of all present when they heard that Solomon had been proclaimed as king, by David's orders! All the courtiers, said Jonathan, were congratulating David, saying, “May Yahweh raise the throne of Solomon yet higher than your own!” while the hoary monarch, who was too weak to leave his bed, was forced to receive and thank them without rising. David's will was not to be disputed. Adonijah's guests fled to their houses in terror, and the prince himself, in fear of his life, sought the nearest place of refuge. This he found in an altar, to the horns of which he clung, crying to the priests and all who saw him there

that he would never stir from the spot until king Solomon, whose humble servant he desired to be, had sworn to spare his life. When Solomon heard of this he sent word that he would grant his request conditionally on his good behaviour, upon which Adonijah bowed to the earth before his royal brother and obtained leave to return to his palace.

A few days afterwards David, who felt that his end was drawing near, took leave of Solomon and gave him a few parting instructions. First as to Joab. He reminded his son of all that this man, whom he hated and feared so intensely, had done; how he had murdered two Israelite generals in time of peace, and had thus steeped himself in blood from head to foot. "Deal with him," he concluded, "according to your wisdom, and let not his hoary head go down in peace to the world below!" On the sons of Barzillai, on the other hand, Solomon was to heap his favours, and was to make them companions of his table because their father had played so noble a part when David was flying from Absalom. But Shimei, the Benjamite of Bahurim, who had cursed the king so bitterly, must not be left unpunished. David himself had sworn by Yahweh that he would spare his life, but this oath was not binding on his son. His own good sense would tell him how to deal with Shimei, but in any case he would send him to the land of shadows in blood.

After making these dispositions David slept in death and was buried in the upper city that was called by his own name. When his history came to be written no one knew exactly how long he had been king, but at any rate his reign had lasted through a whole generation, or "forty years."

What a glorious deathbed was David's, if we regard it from a worldly point of view! "Full of days, full of wealth, full of honour," as the writer of Chronicles expresses it,¹ he

¹ 1 Chronicles xxix. 28.

handed down his kingdom to the most dearly loved of his sons. But what a deeply painful impression that same deathbed leaves upon our minds, if we regard it from a higher point of view! There is one departing whose varied experiences and adventures have left him in crying need of forgiveness himself, and yet his dying lips pronounce a treacherous sentence on two men, to one of whom he was bound by every tie of gratitude, to the other by every tie of honour. The one had always been his faithful servant; he owed the continued possession of his life and crown in great measure to him; and he had never dared himself to curb his overweening spirit. To the other he had given a solemn promise that he would not take his life. What a miserable end! And yet it suited, but too well, much of the life it closed.

Since David's history occupies so great a place in the Bible history, and since he passed for the model of a king amongst after generations, we must endeavour to sketch his true character, and at the same time to explain how it came to pass that such high honour was afterwards accorded him.

But to accomplish the task satisfactorily, we must begin by asking whether there are any other sources from which we may gain information concerning David, in addition to the narratives we have now considered. We certainly should have such sources, if we might rely upon the superscriptions of the three and seventy psalms which are ascribed to David as their author. Were that the case, we should be able to gather from the contents of these songs the religious position occupied by David, and the most secret experiences of his soul on a great variety of critical occasions. We should then have to construct our image of him not only from what we read in the books of Samuel, but also from the knowledge of the inner life of his soul which we should derive from these psalms.—A hopeless task, which has been

laboriously, but vainly attempted by many who have accepted the testimony of the superscriptions!

Let me give one instance to show the impossibility of reconciling the David of the psalms that claim him as their author with the David of the books of Samuel and Kings! The fifty-first psalm is said in the superscription to have been composed by David after Nathan had rebuked him for his sin with Bathsheba. The poem in question is this:—

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness,

Blot out my transgression in the tenderness of thy great mercy.

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,

And cleanse me from my sin.

For I acknowledge my guilt,

And my sin is ever before me.

Against thee, thee only, have I sinned,

And have done what is evil in thy sight;

Therefore thy sentence is just,

And none can reproach thy judgment.

Behold, I was born in guilt,

And in sin did my mother conceive me;

But thou desirest truth in the inward parts,

And teachest me wisdom in my heart.

Purge away my sin with hyssop, that I may be clean;

Wash me, that I may be whiter than snow.

Then let me hear sounds of joy and gladness again,

And make glad the soul thou hast broken.

Hide thy face from my sins,

And blot out all my iniquities.

Create a clean heart within me, O God!

And give me a right spirit.

Cast me not away from thy presence,

And take not thy holy spirit from me.

Restore me the joy of thy salvation ;
Let a willing spirit support me !
Let me teach the transgressors thy ways,
That the sinners may be converted to thee.
Deliver me from the guilt of blood, O God, thou God of
my salvation !
Let my tongue praise thy righteousness.
O Lord ! open thou my lips,
And my mouth shall show forth thy praise.
For thou desirest not sacrifice ;
Else would I give it !
Thou delightest not in burnt offerings.
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.
A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou dost not
despise !

Shew favour to Sion, according to thy pleasure,
Build up Jerusalem's walls ;
Then shalt thou rejoice in good sacrifices,
In a burnt offering and a sacrifice consumed by fire ;
Then bullocks shall be brought to thy altar.

The concluding lines, which obviously place us in a period at which the walls of Jerusalem were in ruins, can hardly belong to the original poem. The contradiction between the promise of a sacrifice of bullocks and the avowal that God desires no sacrifice but a sense of guilt, is sufficiently marked to justify the belief that the concluding lines are a later addition. The rest is unquestionably a beautiful poem. Together with a deep and genuine sense of guilt, it reveals a clearer insight into the origin of sin than is usually met with in the Israelite poets. But this very fact is fatal to David's authorship. It would be strange, to say the least of it, that after his treatment of Uriah he should sing, "Against

thee, O Yahweh, against thee only have I sinned." Again, since David, in common with all his contemporaries, supposed that Yahweh sometimes stirred a man up to sin, expressly that he might have the opportunity of punishing him, he can hardly have breathed the sigh, "Behold I was born in iniquity;" for it implies that sin takes its rise not in the direct instigation of Yahweh, but in the corrupt or imperfect nature of man. "God's sacrifice is an afflicted soul" is a truth which forms a beautiful counterpart to that which the prophetic writer puts into Samuel's mouth, "Obedience is better than sacrifice." But only think of David cherishing such a conviction! David who appeased his God with sacrifices upon every occasion, who recommended Saul to burn a meat offering when Yahweh had incited him against an innocent man, who held back the angel of the pestilence from Jerusalem by offering a sacrifice upon Araunah's threshing floor, who sacrificed seven sons of Saul to appease Yahweh in the time of famine! The sense of guilt, however genuine, may pass away; but if David had ever learned the truth that contrition and humility are the only sacrifice that God desires, then his conduct with regard to the sons of Saul was not only superstitious, as it certainly was in any case, but monstrous and execrable.

It would of course delay us far too long were we to submit all the psalms which are ascribed to David to a similar examination. We will therefore only take one more example, and that a short one. It is the twenty-third psalm:—

Yahweh is my shepherd,
I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the fresh waters;
He quickens my soul,
And leads me in the paths of righteousness
For his name's sake.

Though I walk through a valley dark as death, I will
fear no evil;
For thou art with me,
Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me, in despite of my
enemies.
Thou anointest my head with oil;
My cup is filled to overflowing.
All that is good and prosperous will follow me while I live,
And for length of days shall I dwell in the house of
Yahweh.

It is true that the first words, "Yahweh is my shepherd," seem appropriate enough on the lips of David, who was once a shepherd boy himself; but this is hardly a sufficient reason for ascribing the psalm to him. Indeed, it cannot be his, for in his day there was no particular place which could be called "Yahweh's house" without any further description. The expression could only be used of the temple, and hardly even of the temple before it had become the sole recognised sanctuary of Yahweh. This would place the poem after the Captivity.

It is not so clear in every case, as it is in those we have given, that the psalms ascribed to David were really written at a much later period. But these two specimens will suffice to show that it is not out of mere caprice that we neglect the songs which bear David's name in endeavouring to sketch his character. The superscriptions of the psalms are entirely untrustworthy; and the poems themselves date from periods at which the Israelites had pondered far more deeply upon the nature of true piety, and cherished far other thoughts as to the phenomena of the spiritual life than was the case in David's time. The whole collection forms, as we have already said¹, the hymn-book of the second temple.

¹ Vol. I. p. 35.

In speaking of Moses, we neglected the ninetieth psalm, which is said to be his; in dealing with David's character, we shall put aside the so-called Davidic psalms; and, in the same way, when we come to Solomon we shall pass over the seventy-second and the hundred and twenty-seventh psalms in silence. Strange as it may seem, there is not one of all the psalms ascribed to David which so much as reminds us of his character as portrayed in the historical books; and in the great majority of cases they are quite evidently of a much later origin.

It is easy to understand how David came to be regarded as the chief psalmist of Israel. In the third century before Christ, when the book of Chronicles was written, the time of David was looked upon as the golden age of Israel, and David himself as a model king. Hence the writer of this book gives him as much as possible of the honour of having built the temple.¹ Now, since the ancient tradition represented David as a great singer and player on the harp, and the Jews of this later period could not conceive of a model king composing any but religious music, they imagined David to have been the father of psalmody.

But our actual knowledge of his singing and playing gives us a very different idea of its character. The two solitary poems which we have sufficient grounds for supposing to be his are his elegies upon Saul and Jonathan, and upon Abner; and though the former of these is full of deep and generous feeling, they have neither of them anything of a religious character. The earliest authentic passage in which David's services to the art of music are celebrated occurs in the prophecies of Amos. The prophet² is describing the high-born sots of Jerusalem and Samaria,

Who sing loud songs to the harp
And invent musical instruments, like David,

¹ See p. 14.

² Amos vi. 5, 6.

Who drink and carouse

And anoint themselves with the costliest balsam—
But feel no pain for Joseph's wounds.

Now it is hardly probable that the Israelite revellers were given to singing hymns at their merry-makings, and it seems to follow that in the eighth century David was specially known as the representative of the kind of music suited to festive occasions, the themes of which we may presume were love and wine. And with what other kind of music are we to suppose that David soothed Saul's troubled spirit? Surely a solemn hymn to the glory of the terrible Yahweh would have been less likely than a soft strain of love or a ringing war song to restore the gloomy and despondent king to better spirits.

Nor must we form a too exalted idea of such religious songs as were really produced in these days. When the ark was brought to Jerusalem and David danced and smote the tambourine as he advanced before the sacred chest, we may well believe that the sound of the trumpets pealed through the air, and that shrill cries to Yahweh and his flame of fire rose above the thunder of the drums; but there was small sign of any refinement of religious feeling or depth of religious thought. We still possess a short song which was probably sung when the victorious army had brought back the ark from the camp, and were escorting it to its place in the temple. It now forms the conclusion of a psalm,¹ to the first part of which we shall revert on another occasion. It was probably sung by two choruses in alternation.

Lift up your eternal heads, O gates!

Lift yourselves up, eternal doors!

Let the glorious king go in!—

Who is this glorious king?—

¹ Psalm xxiv. 7–10.

Yahweh, strong and mighty,
Yahweh, terrible in war !—
Lift up your heads, O gates !
Lift yourselves up, eternal doors !
Let the glorious king go in !—
Who is this glorious king ?—
Yahweh of war-hosts.
He is the glorious king.

This song is certainly more vigorous than sweet in tone, more sonorous than exalted ; and it is simple in conception to the last degree.

Just as after generations drew up all their religious laws in the name of Moses, so they made David the great psalmist and Solomon, as we shall presently see, the great proverb writer of Israel. If we wish to know David as he really was, we must put the contents of all these songs completely on one side, and rely exclusively upon the narratives of the books of Samuel and Kings.

Let us, then, go on to ask what manner of man these authorities represent him to have been.

David unquestionably took the cause of religion much to heart, and was more especially a zealous worshipper of Yahweh. This is evident from the great things which the prophets and priests had hoped from him ever since his first appearance. Such men as Samuel, Gad, Nathan, Abimelech, Abiathar, and Zadok stood at his side during the various periods of his life ; and throughout all the changes of his fortune he always kept upon the best of terms with them. The sincerity of his piety is shown by his diligence in consulting his god upon all occasions, by his care in bringing the ark to Jerusalem, by the liberal portion of his booty which he presented to the sanctuary, by the freedom of access to his

person which he always allowed to the prophets, and the submission with which he listened to their words, and, above all, by that noble deed, the best thing that we know of him, his generous sparing of the life of Saul. Inasmuch as Saul was Yahweh's anointed, David spared him for the sake of his god, however much he would have gained in every other respect by the death of his inveterate enemy. David, then, was a religious man.

But his religion, like that of his contemporaries, was far from exalted. We cannot say for certain whether he worshipped Yahweh only. He may also have honoured other gods, though probably in a far smaller measure. The fact that one of his sons was called Baaljada,¹ i.e., *Baal knows*, leads us to suspect that at any rate now and then he paid his homage to some Baal, perhaps to conciliate an influential family, or to please one of his foreign wives. This would not be at all surprising, for if David had a *teraphim* in his house,² and believed that Yahweh could be worshipped nowhere but in Canaan,³ he must have been very far from denying the existence of all other gods. Moreover, he had a very inadequate conception of the nature of Yahweh himself. The manner in which he brought the ark to Jerusalem shows clearly enough that he thought he was bringing Yahweh himself with it. Think, again, of all the superstitious beliefs of the Israelites concerning this ark; of the great plague which it was supposed to cause amongst the Philistines; of the mortality in the family at Bethshemesh that withheld the reverence due to it; of the death of Uzzah, who placed his rash hand upon it; of the prosperity which its presence brought to Obed-Edom; and of the custom of taking it out with the army to war! In perfect consistency with

¹ 1 Chronicles xiv. 7.

² 1 Samuel xix. 13, 16, where *teraphim* should be read for *image*.

³ 1 Samuel xxvi. 19.

all these superstitions David not only used the oracle of Yahweh as a counsellor in all emergencies, including military enterprises and manœuvres, but also observed omens, and when he heard the wind rustling in the tops of the mulberry trees, fancied that it was Yahweh drawing near.¹ He also believed that Yahweh, when angry with any particular man, or with Israel in general, would send such disasters as defeat in battle, famine, the death of a child, or a pestilence; and that sometimes he would himself stir up those who had enraged him, to commit a crime, for the very purpose of being able to punish them for it. The only way in which these disasters could be averted was by a sacrifice; in case of need a fearful and bloody sacrifice, such as the execution of the seven sons of Saul. When Yahweh was wrath he must be *appeased*.

It is true that we have no right to find fault with David for not being superior to his age in these particulars, or to condemn him for entertaining such false ideas; but on the other hand, we must remember that such religion as his is no guarantee in itself of a noble character, may co-exist but too easily with very great defects, and may even stimulate evil passions. For instance, cruelty to the enemies of Yahweh (a term which included all the enemies of his people and his anointed) was anything but inconsistent with religion. David, therefore, could treat his prisoners of war with the utmost barbarity and yet feel no pangs of conscience, and meet with no rebuke from the prophets. Even the vengeance which he took on Shimei after his death was not inconsistent with his reverence for Yahweh, whose anointed this Benjamite had cursed!

But when David committed adultery with Bathsheba and treacherously murdered Uriah, it was a violation of the will of Yahweh. These actions throw a very dark shadow upon his

¹ 2 Samuel v. 24.

life. It would doubtless be unfair to judge a man too hardly for one evil deed, however heinous, since even noble natures are sometimes tempted beyond their strength, and betrayed into fearful sins. But what pains us most is not the act of adultery itself, but the king's foul treachery to his brave and faithful servant, Uriah. If in a fit of despair and dread of discovery he had slain him with his own hand, we might, perhaps, have forgiven him; but that summons from the camp, that invitation to the royal table that the warrior might drink deep and then go home, that letter to Joab, and that cold-blooded message when the news of Uriah's death had come—all this becomes doubly revolting when we think of the deliberate forethought with which it was planned. It is impossible after this to regard David as in any sense an upright man.

The cunning which was in this case turned to so vile a purpose, may be traced in David's conduct upon other occasions also. For instance, even as he fled from Absalom, in the midst of all his grief, he had sufficient presence of mind to lay his plans with great adroitness in sending back the priests with the ark, and urging Hushai to simulate friendship for Absalom.

Cunning, indeed, is natural to the character of such a man as David; for, in spite of his valour on the battle-field, he was sadly wanting in true courage.

He had his own weakness to thank in a great measure for the fearful disasters that blighted his domestic life. He never punished Amnon for his deed of shame, since he loved him, his eldest son, too well! It was this that goaded on Absalom to avenge his sister's wrong; and when Absalom had taken vengeance, David was grieved and angered for a time, and banished Absalom; but he soon allowed himself to be appeased, though he did not dare to acknowledge the change that his sentiments had undergone! So Joab, who

read his thoughts, had to entreat him to show favour to Absalom, and make it appear as though he were acting under more or less constraint. Even then he only half forgave him, and Joab had to intercede again before he would receive him completely into favour. After all this he left him so absolutely unrestrained that he was able publicly to assume the airs of the successor to the throne. When expelled by his son, David was humility itself, went on his way weeping, uttered words of acquiescence in the will of Yahweh, recognised in Shimei's curse a punishment inflicted by his god, and showed every appearance of piety. But the cunning plans which he was devising at the very moment fit but strangely into the picture. So, again, the disturbances that embittered his last days were the consequences of his own vacillation and timidity, for he had evidently promised Bathsheba that her son should succeed him, but had not taken a single step to secure the crown to him.

But nothing more characteristic of David than his relations with Joab. He hates him, feels his dependence upon him, is afraid of him, curses him again and again, tries to get rid of him, but always keeps him at hand, notwithstanding the murder of Abner and Amasa, and finally commands his son to punish the servant whom he feared to touch himself, and who had grown grey in his service.

David was anything but a consistent man. He had no great central purpose to which he devoted all his powers. He was far from possessing such nobility as characterised Saul at the beginning of his reign. Even the measures he took in favour of his religion have a somewhat ambiguous aspect. He was certainly not such an enthusiast in the service of Yahweh as his predecessor had been; and his surrender of the latter's sons to the Gibeonites is a very significant event, for it was a formal condemnation of the policy of Samuel—a concession to public opinion, which regarded this excessive

zeal as dangerous. In religious matters David's policy was one of concession and compromise. He was just as zealous for Yahweh's honour as he thought would be conducive to the stability of his throne; which doubtless showed great prudence, but not much exaltation of soul.

As far as we can trace the history of David's inner life, it resembled that of most other men of energetic and impulsive character whose passions are balanced by no great purpose and checked by no firm moral principle. Easily moved both to good and evil, he was certainly very captivating. Thus he gained and always kept the friendship of the proud and courageous Jonathan. And he on his side, since men are often attracted by their opposites, was ready to repose with perfect confidence upon the loftier moral nature of his friend. Warm in his affections and sincere in his religion—though superficial in this as in everything else—he was far from being a stranger to generous emotions, but could not resist the impulse of the moment. When he confessed his guilt his repentance was doubtless genuine, but it did not strike deep.

It was an evil day for the moral life of this able and fascinating but weak young soldier when he became a king. If Jesus was right in saying "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven," how would he have described the difficulties with which an eastern king has to struggle if he would reach the true path of life and keep to it! All things conspired to ruin the moral character of a king, and we cannot wonder that such a man as David was unable to resist such evil influences. He remained the idol of his warriors to the last; but his moral power seems to have been more and more completely sapped as his years advanced.

We shall constantly observe, however, that after ages passed a very different judgment upon the son of Jesse, and

exalted him to the highest pinnacle of honour. We have already had an indication of this in the stories of the rejection of Saul and the anointing of David, for they show clearly enough what the prophets who wrote them thought of the two men. They regarded David as the man after Yahweh's heart, who succeeded Saul because he was a better man, and whose family should therefore occupy the throne of Israel for ever.¹ The following verses furnish a striking illustration of the honour rendered to David by posterity. They are put into his mouth as his dying words²:—

The words of David, Jesse's son,
The words of him who is placed on high,
The anointed of Jacob's god,
The sweet singer of Israel!
Yahweh's spirit speaks through me,
His word is on my tongue;
The god of Israel spoke,
The rock of Israel said to me:
"He can govern men who is righteous
And rules in the fear of God.
He is like to the morning light at sunrise;
He is like to a cloudless dawn.
After light and rain does the grass grow up."
And is not my house such as this, with God's help?
He has made an eternal covenant with me,
Established on all sides and sure.
All my salvation and all my desire,
Does he not make them grow?
But the worthless are like unto noxious thorns,
Which none will grasp with the hand.
Let him who would touch them have spear-shaft and steel,
And let them be utterly burned up with fire.

¹ 2 Samuel vii. 12—16.

² 2 Samuel xxiii. 1—7.

The fact that the historians and others took such a favourable view of David's character, and commended him as a just ruler, is not to be explained by supposing that they knew of things redounding to his credit, which have not been handed down to us; nor can much stress be laid on the different light in which what we know of him would be regarded in former times. The explanation must be sought simply in the circumstances amidst which these panegyriste lived, and the religious philosophy which determined their views of the history of their people. It was only during the seventy or eighty years of the reigns of David and Solomon that the Israelite tribes formed a single people. The kingdom was afterwards split into two and never united again. Now the prophets of Judah, who lived some two centuries later, looked back with a sense of yearning to the golden age of David and his son, under whose sceptre Israel had been so powerful. They longed for the union of all the tribes under a king of David's house, and firmly believed that their dream would one day be realised; and since they believed that success and prosperity were incompatible with godlessness, they naturally supposed that the two princes under whom Israel had been so great were very pious. Of David, especially, they unconsciously assumed everything that was good. Tradition treated David and Solomon something as it did Gideon and Abimelech; the father was praised and the son blamed, though they were really kindred spirits, and pursued the same line of action, because the fruit of their policy only began to be perceived under the rule of the son. Thus David was exalted far above Solomon, because it was David who founded the dynasty, whereas immediately after Solomon's death the nation fell into two.

David owes the good name he has always enjoyed with posterity very largely to the belief that his subjects were specially happy under his rule, and that his times deserved

on that account to be considered the golden age of Israel. If this were so it would certainly be a great point in his favour. But the prophets who longed for the return of David's age were like the Israelites in the desert, who hungered after the fleshpots of Egypt but forgot all that they had suffered in that land; for the truth is that David's own subjects were anything but satisfied with his rule. His throne was supported by his warlike fame, his body-guard, his "heroes" and his valiant cousin Joab, in a word by force of arms. But the support which Absalom secured is an eloquent testimony to the discontent of the Israelites under David's rule, and if after Solomon's death most of the tribes renounced their allegiance to his son, it was not because Solomon had ruled in a different spirit to that of David, but because he had built upon the foundations his father had laid, and the Israelites, as we shall presently see, could endure it no longer. It was a mistake, therefore, to look back upon the time of David as to a golden age; it was a still greater mistake to laud David himself as a model king.

CHAPTER VII.

SOLOMON.

1 KINGS II. 12—XI. 25.¹

SOLOMON'S accession to his father's throne had met, as we have seen, with considerable opposition; but he soon showed that he was not to be offended with impunity. Joab was slain at the foot of the altar to which he had fled for refuge; Abiathar was banished to his own estate and deposed from the priesthood; Adonijah was spared at first, but was afterwards put to death, in consequence of his presumption in desiring one of his father's concubines for a wife;² Shimei

¹ 2 Chronicles i.—ix.² Vol. II., pp. 393 f.

was ordered to come and live in Jerusalem, and never to leave the city on pain of death; and three years afterwards, when he pursued a couple of runaway slaves to Gath, he, too, paid with his life for his disobedience.

In the countries that David had conquered, his death was the natural signal for insurrectionary movements amongst the subjected tribes; and they seized the opportunity of attempting to throw off the yoke of Israel. In Edom especially the news of David's and of Joab's death unfurled the banner of revolt. It will be remembered that when Joab conquered the Valley of Salt, he had as far as possible exterminated the royal family of Edom; but a scion of the house had found refuge in Egypt, and was even married to a sister-in-law of the Egyptian king. This prince returned to his own land when Solomon ascended the throne, and managed to maintain his footing there. Damascus also fell into the hands of a Syrian prince who had been expelled from it by David, and thenceforth the city retained its independence.¹ But with these exceptions Solomon contrived to hold together the extensive kingdom that his father had left him. In the death of David, Israel had lost the prestige conferred on it by a ruler whose warlike fame inspired terror on every side; but Solomon endeavoured to compensate the loss by fortifying certain cities and establishing a powerful standing army, with twelve thousand cavalry and fourteen hundred war chariots.² He further increased his prestige by his marriage with an Egyptian princess, who brought him the Canaanite city Gezer as a dowry. In the same way he aimed at securing favourable relations with other surrounding peoples also, by contracting alliances with the daughters of their kings.³ On the whole he was successful, and his reign was a peaceful one.

Commerce, too, which he encouraged very zealously,

¹ 1 Kings xi. 14-25.

² 1 Kings x. 26.

³ 1 Kings iii. 1, ix. 16, xi. 1.

flourished greatly under his rule. There was a busy trade between Palestine and Egypt, the latter country furnishing more especially the horses of which Solomon required such great numbers for his cavalry and war chariots. The Egyptian merchants brought them to Tekoa,¹ where Solomon's agents bought them up, and the king either made use of them himself or sold them at a profit to the independent princes of the Hittites, and the Syrians. There was a great trade with Arabia, too, especially in spices.² Maritime commerce, too, was greatly developed, which is a striking proof of enterprise. Solomon even built ships at Eziongeber, on the southern spur of Seir, manned them partially with Phoenicians, and sent them to trade with Ophir, probably Hindustan, whence they brought valuable wood, precious stones, gold, silver, and ivory, as well as monkeys and peacocks. Such an expedition took three years in those times, and the ships employed in the trade were called ships of Tarshish (Tartessus), *i.e.*, ships of the largest build, such as were usually employed to sail to Tartessus in Spain.³ The treasure that flowed from this commerce into Jerusalem, especially into the royal coffers, was enormous. Every year, says the tradition, six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold [a talent is about two hundred and thirty-three pounds troy weight] came into the king's treasury; silver was thought no more of in Jerusalem than stones, and the costly cedar trunks were valued no more than the commonest timber.⁴ Such was the wealth of the capital!

The purpose which David had never been able to accomplish, though he had collected all the treasure he could for it, was now carried out by his son. In the fourth year of his reign, Solomon began to build a magnificent temple for Yahweh on the north-eastern summit of Zion. In seven and a half

¹ After an amended version of 1 Kings x. 28.

² 1 Kings x. 15.

³ 1 Kings ix. 26-28, x. 22.

⁴ 1 Kings x. 14, 21, 27.

years the work was completed, and thereupon the king laid the foundations of a royal palace, which it took thirteen years to build.¹ This palace was probably situated on the eastern edge of the western summit of Zion, right opposite the Temple, with which it was connected by a bridge.² Near the palace was another building that deserves special mention. It was reared entirely upon pillars and rafters of cedar-wood, and was therefore called "the house of Lebanon." It served as an audience hall. There was also a separate residence for the Egyptian princess, who was the most distinguished of the monarch's many wives.³ Besides the temple for Yahweh, Solomon raised sanctuaries to Ash-toreth, Milcom, and Chemosh, the gods of the Sidonians, the Ammonites, and the Moabites respectively.⁴ Besides all this he expended fabulous sums in works of art. First of all there were two lofty and magnificent brazen pillars standing at the portico of the temple. They were called Jachin and Boaz. The capitals were beautifully carved, and all was the work of a smith, called Hiram, whose father was a Tyrian, but his mother an Israelite of the tribe of Naphtali. Then there was the so-called "brazen sea," which was also made for the temple. It was a great washing vat of eight hundred and eighty gallons capacity, supported by twelve oxen and adorned by ornamental work, all of brass. Then there were ten brazen pedestals, ornamented with bas-reliefs, upon which lavers of about a hundred and seventy gallons' capacity rested, besides many other utensils for sacrifice and purification. How much brass all this required is not known, for it was never weighed. There were also many golden utensils, such as the lamp stand, the censers, the table for the shew-bread, and more besides.⁵ For all these purposes the treasures collected by David were of the utmost service to his son.

¹ 1 Kings vi. 1, 37, 38, vii. 1.

² See Map IV., *Jerusalem*, No. 7.

³ 1 Kings vii. 8, ix. 24.

⁴ 1 Kings xi. 7.

⁵ 1 Kings vii. 13--51.

Solomon's palace was still more magnificently furnished than the temple. Thus in "the house of Lebanon" two hundred shields were suspended, each gilt with six hundred shekels (nearly twenty-three pounds troy weight) of gold, and three hundred smaller ones, upon each of which half that quantity of gold was laid. All these were for Solomon's body-guard.¹ There was also a great ivory throne, inlaid with fine gold. The seat was approached by six steps, on each of which were two carved lions. Of course, the utensils of the royal table were all of pure gold. What value had silver at the court of Solomon!²

The luxury of the life at court defies all description. The number of Solomon's wives was great, though, no doubt, the book of Kings exaggerates it enormously in saying that he had seven hundred princesses and three hundred inferior wives in his harem.³ Elsewhere the number is incidentally given⁴ as sixty of the first rank and eighty of the second, which is much more likely. But even so, think of the bustle of a court in which sixty princesses with their chamber-women and attendants were established, even though they had not all separate residences as the Egyptian princess had! Our imagination is assisted by the statement that every day thirty oxen, ten of them specially fattened, and a hundred sheep, were slaughtered for the royal table, in addition to game, poultry, and confectionery.⁵

The fame of Solomon's wealth, and especially of the splendour of Yahweh's temple, spread far and wide, and people came from distant lands to see with their own eyes. Even the queen of Sheba, in Arabia Felix, undertook the difficult journey to Palestine to pay Solomon a visit, and to test his penetration by riddles. She reached Jerusalem with a numerous escort of armed attendants and a drove of camels

¹ 1 Kings x. 16, 17.

² 1 Kings x. 18-21.

³ 1 Kings xi. 3.

⁴ Song of Solomon vi. 8.

⁵ 1 Kings iv. 22, 23.

laden with spices, gold, and precious stones; and there she propounded to the king her cunningly-devised enigmas, but he solved them all. Then he conducted her through his palace, and she saw the treasure rooms, the apartments of the officers of the court and their subordinates, the wardrobes, and the wine-cellars, after which she was present at a magnificent festival in the temple.¹ When she had seen all this she was speechless with amazement, and at last cried out, "Truly, I heard such wondrous things about you in my own land that I could hardly give them credence; but now that I have seen with my own eyes, I declare they did not tell me one-half of the truth. You are so much wiser and richer than I had heard! Happy are your courtiers! Happy are they who can always stand in your presence and listen to your words! May Yahweh, your god, who takes such pleasure in you that he has put you upon the throne of Israel and has made you king to maintain the right, be praised for ever!" After this she made the king a present of a great weight of gold (the tradition says a hundred and twenty talents, or about twenty-eight thousand pounds troy weight!!), an immeasurable quantity of balsam, and a number of precious stones. Then she returned home.²

So incomparably glorious was the splendour of Solomon!

In the account of the Arabian Queen's visit to Solomon stress is laid not only on the king's wealth, but also on his wisdom, the fame of which had extended far and wide; and, indeed, the wisdom of Solomon became proverbial in Israel. We must try to form a correct idea of what we are to understand by this expression. Let us begin by inquiring what the writer of the book of Kings has to say upon the subject.

Solomon, he says,³ loved Yahweh and obeyed him as his

¹ After an amended version of 1 Kings x. 5.

² 1 Kings x. 1—13.

³ 1 Kings iii. 2—15.

father David had done, only he sacrificed upon the *bamahs*. At the beginning of his reign, for instance, he went to the celebrated *bamah* at Gibeon and offered a thousand head of cattle there as a burnt sacrifice to Yahweh. The god, on his side, showed him extraordinary favour, for he appeared to him the night after the sacrifice and asked, "What gift should you most desire to receive from me?" To this the youthful king replied, "O Lord, thou hast rewarded my father for his justice and faithfulness to thee, and hast shown him favour and hast given him a son to sit upon his throne. And so by thy grace I have been made king over this people. But now, O Yahweh, though I stand at the head of this countless people which thou hast chosen, I am young and ignorant. Oh! give me the insight I shall need to pronounce judgment for my subjects in justice and truth; for it is a task almost too hard for man." This request earned the emphatic approval of Yahweh, as Solomon perceived from the divine response: "Since you have asked for this, rather than for long life, or wealth, or fame in war, I will give you what you desire; I will give you a wise and understanding heart such as no one ever had before you or will ever have after you. And I will also give you what you have not asked, namely wealth and renown; and you shall be greater than any king that ever was or shall be. And if you are but true to me as your father David was, I will also give you a long life." Upon this Solomon awoke and found that it had all happened in a dream. Soon afterwards he returned to Jerusalem, where he sacrificed again by the ark of the covenant of Yahweh, and prepared a great feast for his servants.

In this story we trace the religious ideas of a much later age. For instance, Solomon is reproached for sacrificing on a *bamah*, which seems very extraordinary under the circumstances; for if he had been guilty in this act of a conscious and wilful piece of disobedience to Yahweh, is it not more

than strange that the god said nothing about it in the vision, but treated Solomon as a prince who was beginning his reign in the most praiseworthy spirit possible? The writer of the Chronicles saw the difficulty, and attempted to vindicate the legality of the sacrifice at Gibeon¹ by saying that the "tent of conference" used by Moses, and the brazen altar of burned offerings employed in the desert were standing there, and that the ark only was at Jerusalem. But the truth is, as we have frequently observed already, that in Solomon's time no one dreamed of a religious law confining sacrifices to a single place, nor did anyone for a moment disapprove of altars being built and sacrifice offered in many different places. In several later chapters of the book of Kings we find the same reproach urged against pious princes: "Only the people were allowed to sacrifice on *bamahs*." This is because the writer, who lived about the time of the Babylonian captivity, could not conceive of piety expressing itself under any forms but those of his own day; and since he supposed the book of Deuteronomy, which was the only law-book of any considerable extent with which he was acquainted, to be the work of Moses, he naturally thought that the princes of former times ought to have observed its precepts.

According to our writer, then, Solomon's wisdom was of a distinctly religious type, and was closely connected with the worship of Yahweh and obedience to his commandments. But as a fact we must entirely banish all religious associations from our minds if we would understand what was meant in Solomon's time by the word which is usually translated "wisdom." The history of Solomon's wisdom resembles that of David's music. In either case the imagination of posterity has given a thoroughly religious character to what was in reality purely secular; and just as David was made the author of a number of psalms, so various works of the

¹ 2 Chronicles i. 3 ff.

so-called "sages," or proverb makers, were ascribed to Solomon. This is the case more especially with the book of Proverbs; and since this work is pervaded, especially in its early chapters, by a deeply religious spirit, it was naturally supposed that Solomon likewise believed "the fear of Yahweh to be the beginning of wisdom."¹

We ourselves are not in the habit of including any religious ideas under the term "wisdom," though we involuntarily think of it as something noble. We call a man "wise" who governs his life by fixed principles, which lead him to some worthy goal, and thus the word, indirectly at least, excludes immorality. But the Israelites of Solomon's time included every kind of penetration or even cunning under the word which we translate "wisdom." For instance, Amnon's unprincipled friend Jonadab is described as a very "wise" man, because he contrived a successful plot for drawing Tamar out of the women's palace,² and the same word is applied to the woman of Tekoa, who so cleverly and eloquently induced David to comply with Joab's wishes.³ So, too, the woman of Abel-beth-Maachah, who devised the means of delivering the place of her abode from Joab, is most emphatically called "wise," though her plan was the very simple one of killing the rebel who had taken refuge there, and for whose sake Joab had threatened the city!⁴ So also when the dying David pointed out to his son the necessity of punishing Joab and Shimei, he told him to act according to his wisdom.⁵ Surely the wisdom which dictated their destruction was of no very exalted type! We are tempted to ask how such absolutely common-place indications of foresight could possibly earn the title of wisdom; but we must remember that in those days the standard of intellectual development was very low, and the proverb says truly that

¹ Proverbs i. 7 ff.

² 2 Samuel xiii. 3.

³ 2 Samuel xiv. 2.

⁴ 2 Samuel xx. 16.

⁵ 1 Kings ii. 6, 9.

"a one-eyed man is a king amongst the blind." The Israelites of the eleventh and tenth centuries before Christ were only just emerging from a state of barbarism and ignorance, and were in almost all respects on a low level of cultivation. Thus a man with what we should consider a very common-place understanding passed, in those days, for a marvel of knowledge and acuteness.

This goes far to explain the influence which the priests exerted through their oracles. Doubtless it would be of immense importance to a warrior, for instance, to gain the sanction of the oracle even for the most obvious measures, since a response from the deity would inspire his men with far more courage than they would derive from the simple orders of their general. This may have been David's motive in consulting the oracle as to many points on which, as a bold and experienced warrior, he must have been perfectly competent to form an opinion for himself. "Will Saul come to Keilah, to take me captive?" he asks, when he hears of Saul's intention.¹ "Will the people betray me to him?"² "Must I pursue the band of marauders who have burnt down Ziklag?"³ "Had I better go to one of the cities of Judah?" "Which city is best?"⁴ Nay, on one occasion the oracle has even to tell him that he would do well to attack the Philistines in the rear.⁵ Surely such a warrior as David might have made that discovery himself! Nevertheless the oracle would not have been so powerful had it not met a genuine want by often guiding those who were really at a loss how to act; and the frequency with which even clever men consulted it shows that people often distrusted their own faculties in dealing with very simple problems. The rarity of moderately acute intellects accounts for the immense value attached to the advice of such men as Ahithophel and Hushai, who had rather more

¹ 1 Samuel xxiv. 11.

² 1 Samuel xxiv. 12.

³ 1 Samuel xxx. 8.

⁴ 2 Samuel ii. 1.

⁵ 2 Samuel v. 23, 24.

penetration than others, and explains David's alarm when he heard that the former had embraced the cause of his son; for "his advice was like a word of God."¹ It does not follow, then, that Solomon's wisdom was such as would have earned him any very great reputation in the present day.

Let us see what is recorded of it.

The book of Kings gives us the following specimen of his wisdom in pronouncing judgment:²

Once two women came before the king, one of whom brought a heavy charge against the other. "We live," she said, "in one house; and a short time ago I had a baby boy, and a day or two afterwards she had one too; but she overlay her child last night and killed it. When she saw what she had done she got up, and, while I was asleep, she took away my child that was lying in bed with me and put her own dead child into my arms. So in the morning, when I was going to feed my child, I found that it was dead; but when it was light and I looked at the child more closely, I saw that it was not mine at all, and that she had changed the children. But there was no one else in the house to prove the truth of what I say." The other woman utterly denied the charge, and persisted that the living child was hers. Who was to decide? The assertion of the one and the denial of the other were equally emphatic. But Solomon was not at a loss. He ordered one of his body guard to draw his sword, and exclaimed angrily, as though he were irritated by having such an insoluble question submitted to him: "Cut the living child in two, and give each mother half!" Then the truth was discovered, for the true mother was full of pity for the child, and as soon as she heard the cruel words she cried in terror, "No! no! my lord, do not kill him! give him to her rather than that!" But the other woman, who had persisted that the living child was hers more out of

¹ 2 Samuel xv. 31, xvi. 23.

² 1 Kings iii. 16—28.

obstinacy and spite than affection, declared herself quite satisfied with the judgment. Thus she betrayed herself, and when Solomon said, "The first is the real mother, give her the child!" everyone saw that his judgment was true. The fame of this decision spread through all the land, and inspired everyone with the deepest reverence for such a king. Who could dare to face him with a lie? Wisdom of God was in him, and that was why he could judge so marvellously. "An oracle is upon his lips. In his judgments he will not err."¹

Solomon's wisdom was displayed not only in discovering the truth and pronouncing just sentences, but also in making proverbs. He had, as the book of Kings expresses it,² "knowledge as the sand on the sea shore," so that he excelled the sons of the East and the Egyptians in understanding, and no man could be compared to him for wisdom, no not even Ethan the Ezrahite, nor Heman, nor Chalcol, nor Darda. So his fame was spread amongst all surrounding peoples; and he composed three thousand proverbs and a thousand and five poems about all the trees from the cedar down to the wild marjoram that grows on the wall, and about all animals, whether four-footed, or winged, or creeping things, or fishes. Thus he became so famous that people came from every country to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and all the kings who heard of it sent embassies to him.

Who the four men were who are mentioned with the Ishmaelites and Egyptians, as types of wisdom, we do not know. The book of Chronicles makes Heman and Ethan, together with Asaph, David's chief choirmasters,³ and even gives their genealogies.⁴ But these data deserve as little confidence as the superscriptions of the eighty-eighth and eighty-ninth psalms, which ascribe them respectively to Heman and Ethan.

¹ Proverbs xvi. 10.

² 1 Kings iv. 29—34.

³ 1 Chronicles xv. 17.

⁴ 1 Chronicles vi. 33 ff., 44 ff.

It is of far more consequence that we should form a correct idea of the nature of Solomon's proverbs and songs. We must be careful not to be misled by the expression, "he spoke of all plants and animals," or to suppose that he conducted any scientific investigations, or busied himself with botany and zoology. Such studies were very far above the reach of himself and his contemporaries. That he made proverbs and songs on all the trees and animals means that he made comparisons borrowed from these objects. Unfortunately there is not one of all the proverbs that bear his name which we can say with certainty is his. Our book of Proverbs consists of several collections which their contents show to belong to very different periods. But the oldest of these collections¹ was not made before the eighth century B.C.; and it is perfectly clear that most of the proverbs it contains are not Solomon's. In the first place, many of them speak of the king, of his glory, and of the conduct which his servants ought to pursue if they wish to obtain his favour, in a manner which would come very oddly from the mouth of the king himself.² Nor can we easily imagine King Solomon, with his hundred wives or more, uttering such words as these: "Who finds a wife, finds a blessing, and obtains a proof of Yahweh's favour;"³ or, "It is better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and angry woman."⁴ These and other such sayings⁵ surely imply the experience of simple citizens who, as a rule, had only one wife each, rather than that of a king—especially such a king as Solomon. Nor does it seem appropriate for him to utter complaints of the disobedience of children, praise of sons who comply with their parents' wishes, proverbs borrowed from the cultivation of

¹ Proverbs x. 1—xxii. 16.

² Proverbs xvi. 10, 14, 15, xx. 2, 8, xxi. 1, xxii. 11, xxv. 3, 5—7, xxix. 4, 14.

³ Proverbs xviii. 22.

⁴ Proverbs xxi. 19.

⁵ Proverbs xiv. 1, xix. 13, 14, xxi. 9.

land and cattle-breeding, exhortations to integrity in business, warnings against trusting in wealth, and, above all, against licentiousness. Fancy Solomon saying: "Better is privation with the fear of Yahweh, than abundance with a troubled mind."¹ Think of Solomon declaring: "Horsemen are prepared for the day of battle, but the victory comes from Yahweh!"² This saying is exactly appropriate to the mouth of a religious man of the eighth century or later, for then the sharp contrast between the vanity of warlike preparations and the might of Yahweh's help was deeply imprinted on many a heart;³ but the sentiment would come strangely from a king who had made enormous preparations for war, and amongst other things had yoked and equipped hundreds of war chariots. We have already said that David would be more than a psychological riddle, that he would be a simple monster, had he united the actions ascribed to him by history with religious views to which only the best of the Israelites centuries afterwards attained. And the same holds good of his son. The Proverbs recognise Yahweh as omniscient,⁴ as the knower of hearts,⁵ who loves goodness more than sacrifice,⁶ as the ruler of the world,⁷ and much more in the same vein. Can we believe that such a confession of faith lay in the heart of Solomon as he built his temples to all those other gods! Surely such conceptions were foreign to the whole age, and Yahweh was as yet no more than the god of Israel.

It would probably be impossible to form too simple an idea of the proverbs of Solomon and his contemporaries. They ran, for instance, as follows: "From the godless man comes wickedness."⁸ "If a man meets his enemy, will he let

¹ Proverbs xv. 16.

² Proverbs xxi. 31.

³ Vol. II. pp. 67—69.

⁴ Proverbs xv. 3.

⁵ Proverbs xv. 11, xvi. 2.

⁶ Proverbs xxi. 3.

⁷ Proverbs xvi. 4.

⁸ 1 Samuel xxiv. 13.

him go unhurt?"¹ Such as the man is, such is his strength." "A warrior at bay is like a bear robbed of her cubs."² "A fugitive is like a partridge on the mountains."³ "Woman's beauty without sense is a golden ring in a sow's snout."⁴ "A merry heart is a perpetual feast."⁵ "The sluggard is the spendthrift's brother."⁶ "A poor man entreats, but a rich man speaks roughly."⁷ "He who seeks impossibilities is like an eagle flying to the heavens."⁸ "The sot and the glutton grow poor, and sluggishness is clothed in rags."⁹ "When you meet with honey, eat not too much, or you will loath it and be sick of it."¹⁰ "A mouth full of beautiful teeth is like a flock of sheep coming up from the washing."¹¹ "Rosy cheeks between locks of hair are like the halves of a pomegranate."¹²

Not only did the "wits" utter such sayings as these, but they often asked each other riddles, and vied with each other in skill in answering them. Such was the object of the queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon; and according to Josephus, Hiram of Tyre engaged in a contest of this kind with Solomon, which cost the loser dear, for whoever failed to guess the other's thought had to pay a heavy fine.

Our book of Proverbs contains many sayings which were perhaps originally uttered in the form of riddles. For example: "What is as sweet as honey?—Pleasant discourse, for it is sweet to the soul and a medicine to the bones."¹³ "What is worse than meeting a bear?—Meeting a fool in a fit of folly."¹⁴ "What is like seizing a dog by his ears?—Meddling with a quarrel not your own."¹⁵ "What is like a

¹ 1 Samuel xxiv. 20.² Judges viii. 21.³ 2 Samuel xvii. 8.⁴ 1 Samuel xxvi. 19.⁵ Proverbs xi. 22.⁶ Proverbs xv. 15.⁷ Proverbs xviii. 9.⁸ Proverbs xviii. 23.⁹ After an amended version of Proverbs xxiii. 5.¹⁰ Proverbs xxiii. 21.¹¹ Proverbs xxv. 16.¹² Song of Solomon vi. 6.¹³ Song of Solomon vi. 7.¹⁴ Proverbs xvi. 24.¹⁵ Proverbs xvii. 12.¹⁶ Proverbs xxvi. 17.

dog turning back to its own vomit?—A fool who keeps doing the same piece of folly.”¹ “What is heavier than a stone and more burdensome than sand?—A fool’s anger.”² “What is sweet at first and then like sand in the mouth?—Stolen food.”³ “What is worth more than gold?—A good name.”⁴ Sometimes two answers were given to the same question; for instance, “What is like snow in summer?—A faithful messenger, for he refreshes the soul of him who sends him;”⁵ or, “A token of respect paid to a fool.”⁶ These “riddles,” as we may call them for want of a better name, have considerable analogy to several familiar games of the present day, and we shall not be far wrong in thinking of Solomon with his courtiers and guests as employing themselves in some such sports amid a cross-fire of question and answer, repartee and witticism. What a splendid opportunity there was for flattering the prince when someone asked, “What is the roaring of the lion like?” and how adroitly it was seized by the man who answered, “The anger of a king! for whoever opposes it sins against himself.”⁷ But we may be sure the following proverb was not made at court: “A roaring lion and a bear greedy for prey is the wicked ruler of a poor people.”⁸

To appreciate this play of wit as it deserves, we must bear in mind what has just been said of the rudeness of the age; but would it not be like new life to many a one in our own day had he wit enough to play such a game? To excel in it would require keener observation, greater readiness and higher powers of concise expression, than most of us possess. In those days it certainly marked a great advance, when the example of the court made such amusements popular in different ranks of society, and enabled them now and then to

¹ Proverbs xxvi. 11. ² Proverbs xxvii. 3. ³ Proverbs xx. 17.

⁴ Proverbs xxii. 1. ⁵ Proverbs xxv. 13.

⁶ Proverbs xxvi. 1. ⁷ Proverbs xx. 2. ⁸ Proverbs xxviii. 15.

supersede in part the warlike exercises and rude sports which had hitherto reigned supreme. This fashion stimulated observation of nature and still more of man; and though not exactly study, it was not very remote from it, and might easily lead up to it; for while the less cultivated were exchanging simple, almost childish questions and answers, the more advanced would ask such riddles as the one ascribed to Samson: "When does sweet food come from the strong devourer?"¹

It is obvious that Solomon's wisdom had no distinctively religious character. Though not in itself irreligious or hostile to the worship of Yahweh, it had no connection with that worship except in its reverence for the simplest laws of morality. It was broadly human; and an Edomite or Philistine could have practised it just as well as an Israelite; a worshipper of Chemosh or Astarte might have engaged with a servant of Yahweh in such a contest without the difference of their religion ever disturbing them. Indeed "wisdom" was regarded with disfavour on this very ground by the prophets and the zealots of Yahweh. It was far too worldly for their taste. But it was equally natural that the masses should esteem it highly. It lay within their reach, and was entirely comprehensible to them. And the consequence is that from Solomon's time onwards we find the "sages" formally recognised in Israelite history. They were men who made proverbs, gave advice, uttered warnings and lessons of practical wisdom. Sitting in the gate, which was the great place of intercourse amongst the inhabitants of the town or village, they gave their precepts to the bystanders, repeated what they had heard from previous sages, and invented wise sayings or pointed apothegms. Their words were respectfully received, were retold and passed from mouth to mouth, and were not without influence upon the life of the people.

¹ See Vol. II. pp. 230 f.

Generally the sages were advanced in years, but of course it was possible for younger men to distinguish themselves in this capacity. All that was wanted was common-sense, a good memory, a little penetration, and a fair command of language. These qualifications could raise a man into a leading position amongst the people, for during the centuries immediately following the time of Solomon the counsel of the wise men was as highly valued as the oracle of the prophets or the commandment of the priests.¹ Now these "wise men" regarded Solomon as their great prototype, and this is why some of their writings, such as Ecclesiastes, are put forward under his name, and why the Proverbs are described as "proverbs of Solomon." From the time of this monarch dates the public recognition of common-sense, reflection, and penetration as a power in Israel.

Some three centuries later a man of an upright and religious spirit who desired, under the form of a law, to exhort the princes of Judah to perform their duties, drew a picture of a king as he ought *not* to be.² He evidently borrowed the picture from the history of Solomon; for after saying that if the people should desire a king, they must in any case select an Israelite by birth and not a stranger, he goes on to warn the prince against extensive horse-breeding, a great number of wives, and large stores of gold and silver, while commanding him to study the Law diligently that he may not become overweening and sin through pride, but may reign long and pass down the crown to his posterity.

At the very time at which these rules for the king's guidance were drawn up, the picture of Solomon was sketched as we have it in the book of Kings; and if not from the hand of the same author as the law, it is at any rate due

¹ Jeremiah xviii. 18; Ezekiel vii. 26.

² Deuteronomy xvii. 14-20.

to a man of similar convictions. Yet in it Solomon is spoken of on the whole with honour. His prayer for wisdom was heard, wealth and distinction were given him as well; his rule was brilliant: "Judah and Israel dwelt in safety, every man under his own vine and his own fig-tree, from Dan to Beersheba, as long as he lived."¹ "Judah and Israel were countless as the sand by the sea shore, and they ate and drank and were happy."² It could not be denied, indeed, that Solomon had served strange gods, but this was ascribed to his love for his foreign wives, who persuaded him in his old age not only to build temples for Chemosh, Milcom, and Ashtoreth, but even to make sacrifices himself to these and many other deities.³

But this representation of things is evidently quite misleading. The writer himself betrays the fact that he arranges his materials in the order that seems to him best to account for the king's conduct; for after mentioning his idolatry, he goes on to say that Yahweh was angry with him for it, and punished him by stirring up Hadad the Edomite and Rezon the Syrian to make war upon him.⁴ But, as a matter of fact, these two men raised the standard of revolt immediately after Solomon had ascended the throne,⁵ and so cannot possibly have been sent by Yahweh to punish one of the last deeds of his reign. It is easy to see what gave rise to the historian's representations. A religious man of the seventh century B.C. could not believe that the king, who had shown such zeal in the worship of Yahweh as to build the temple at Jerusalem, could have been an idolator at the same time; for, to his mind, the two things were absolutely incompatible.

But in Solomon's time there was nothing so 'monstrous in the combination; and, in fact, a prince who governed

¹ 1 Kings iv. 25.

² 1 Kings iv. 20.

³ 1 Kings xi. 1-8.

1 Kings xi. 9-25.

See p. 92.

upon his principles could scarcely help worshipping strange gods. The interests of commerce required it ; for if the Israelites wished to have regular intercourse with their neighbours, they must allow them to come and settle in their cities, though perhaps, after the usage of antiquity, only in special quarters. Now, in this case the foreign residents in the cities of Israel must of course be allowed to worship their own gods. Again, whenever treaties were made with any of the surrounding peoples they must be confirmed by sacrifices offered not only to Yahweh, but also to the god of the tribe with whom the treaty was made. The commandment, "Thou shalt worship no other gods but Yahweh," practically forbade any sustained intercourse with foreigners, for it was an insult to a nation to refuse to worship its god. And why should Solomon have any scruples in the matter ? Suppose the commandment to worship no other gods to have been in existence already, which is exceedingly doubtful,¹ there can have been but very few who understood and observed it, for to do so implies an exalted conception of Yahweh's nature, which was certainly foreign to the Israelites of this period in general. As yet Yahweh was simply their national deity, who could only be worshipped in Canaan, or perhaps in a sort of way wherever a number of Israelites were settled. Why then should Israelite merchants hesitate to worship the gods of the countries in which they happened to be ? Why should not the king oblige his friendly neighbours, such as the Phœnicians, or his own subjects, such as the Moabites and Ammonites, by building temples for their deities ? Such things were common enough in ancient times ; and though Solomon only appears to have gone so far as this in favour of three deities, yet we may safely assume that he sent rich presents to the foreign temples not only of these, but of many other gods. He could hardly have retained a good

¹ See Vol. II., p. 96.

understanding with their worshippers otherwise. Now, all this was, perhaps, condemned by the zealots of Yahweh; but the mass of the people approved of it, and Solomon himself, who encouraged commerce, industry, art, "wisdom," and in short everything that was not distinctively Israelitish, would certainly see no harm in it.

What raised Solomon so high in the eyes of posterity was his building the Temple. The historian accordingly is very full in his account of it.¹ He tells us that Solomon made a treaty with Hiram of Tyre, by which the latter undertook to help him in building his temple and his palace. For this purpose he supplied him with cedar and cypress wood, for which Solomon paid him in wheat and oil for use at his court. But Solomon required the services of his own subjects also. He summoned thirty thousand men to hew timber with the Phœnicians on Mount Lebanon, and they relieved each other in three shifts, one of which was always at work. The timber was then taken by sea to some port, according to the Chronicles Joppa,² whence it was carried by land to Jerusalem. The transport of this timber employed seventy thousand men, and eighty thousand were busied in cutting the stones. Hundreds of overseers superintended the work, and Adoniram directed the whole.

On the summit of Moriah, once the threshing-floor of Araunah, the temple was built with square stones. They were cut and trimmed before they were brought to the spot, so that no chisels were required there. Inside, the walls were lined with a wainscoting of cedar wood, and gold was laid on with a prodigal hand. The sanctuary was surrounded by a number of chambers, arranged in three stories, which served as magazines, bakehouses, workshops, and houses for the priests. The temple itself, which was sixty

¹ 1 Kings v., vi., vii. 13—ix. 14.

² 2 Chronicles ii. 16.

cubits in length, twenty in breadth, and thirty in height, consisted of two chambers, the Holy and the Holy of Holies, the former measuring forty cubits in length and the latter twenty. It appears that the ceiling of the Holy of Holies stood twenty cubits from the floor, and that this chamber was therefore an exact cube. In it were stationed two great gilt cherubs, symbolical forms, whose outspread wings touched either wall, and met in the middle of the chamber, covering the place where the ark rested. The ark contained nothing but the two stone tablets upon which the law of the Ten Commandments was engraved. Its bearing poles ran parallel with the end walls of the chamber, and were so long that when the folding doors, which separated the two chambers, were thrown wide open, the knobs at the end of the poles could just be seen by those standing inside the Holy, but not by anyone standing still further back. The folding doors were adorned with golden pomegranates, lilies, flower-buds, and cherubs, and so were the pillars that stood at the portico of the temple, which was about ten cubits deep and thirty high, as well as the lavers and other magnificent apparatus already described.¹

When all was ready the ark was conducted amid great rejoicings to the new sanctuary, and twenty-two thousand oxen, with a hundred and twenty thousand sheep, were sacrificed on the occasion. As soon as the ark was set down in its place Yahweh signified his approval, for "the cloud"—doubtless the pillar of cloud which had guided Israel through the desert is meant—filled the house, so that the priests could not remain in it. Then Solomon, after giving expression to his joy at the completion of the work, uttered a long prayer, in which he entreated Yahweh to hear all supplications offered to him in that temple, and, finally, pronounced a blessing upon the people. The feast that now succeeded lasted for seven days.

¹ See p. 94.

When Solomon had completed his work, Yahweh appeared to him again and promised to confirm his throne, but at the same time threatened the Israelites with destruction should they worship other gods than Yahweh.

When the temple and the royal palace were completed, Solomon was so deeply in Hiram's debt that he could only meet his claims by ceding a piece of land to him on which were twenty-towns. The Tyrian king, however, was not satisfied even then, and called the district Cabul, or, "as good as nothing."

This impossible derivation, which closes the narrative, and the statement that the cloud of Yahweh filled the temple, are in themselves significant indications that the account of the building of the temple has been embellished by a later age; and the prayer and blessing of Solomon convince us that the writer lived in the time of the Captivity. It is also quite in the spirit of this later period to lay such stress upon the fact that Levitical priests¹ officiated on the occasion. The writer of Chronicles adorns the tale yet further, distinguishes between the priests and the Levites, as the Law required in his day, makes separate mention of the choirs of musicians and singers, and even says that fire came down from heaven to consume the sacrifice of consecration.

The description of Solomon's temple gives us no clear conception of its details, nor is it at all certain that it is correct even as far as it goes. For in the course of centuries the temple was more than once restored, and doubtless frequently repaired and beautified; and it even appears that some of its principal features were from time to time modified, in order to suit the changing ideas of the Israelites. It is, therefore, difficult to believe that a writer, who lived three centuries afterwards, could have had any accurate knowledge of its original form and arrangements. In some

¹ In 1 Kings viii. 4, *the priests and the Levites* should be *the Levitical priests*.

respects it is almost certain he was mistaken. For instance, he speaks of a brazen altar¹ that stood before the temple; but a law, which was issued after Solomon's time, still forbids the use of any altars not made of earth or of unhewn stones,² and the introduction of brazen altars appears to have taken place at a later date. Mention is also made of an inner and an outer forecourt,³ but it is very questionable whether this distinction was really observed in Solomon's temple, for its purpose was to separate the priests from the laity; and at a time when the king himself could perform the functions of a priest and pronounce the blessing, this sharp distinction can hardly have existed, and a layman was doubtless allowed to approach the sanctuary as close as though he were a priest.

The historian extols Solomon greatly for building the temple. No wonder, for when he wrote it was the only lawful sanctuary of Yahweh. But we have already seen, when speaking of David's intention to build a temple,⁴ that Solomon's contemporaries were not as much pleased with the work as their descendants were. We have also spoken of the considerations that qualified their approval, and it must be confessed that the temple at Jerusalem was a greater boon to the monarchy than to religion. It was a great stroke of policy on the part of David to take the ark to Sion, and Hiram was quite right in saying that it was "wise" of Solomon⁵ to build a magnificent temple to Yahweh in his capital; for by this means the reverence felt towards Yahweh was made to confer stability upon the throne, and the interests of the human and divine institutions of Jerusalem were brought into very close alliance.

Moreover, there was not a little in the arrangements and the ornamentation of the temple which must have offended the strict disciples of Moses. Most of the ornamental work,

¹ 1 Kings viii. 64; 2 Chronicles iv. 1.

² Exodus xx. 25.

³ 1 Kings vii. 12, viii. 64.

⁴ See pp. 15, 16.

⁵ 1 Kings v. 7.

was done by Hiram, who was half an Israelite and half a Tyrian; and, no doubt, Phœnician artists supplied the minor adornments also. Now, these pomegranates and lilies, these flowers and cherubs were not objects chosen at random, but had a distinct symbolical significance. What the cherub meant we do not know. It has been variously conjectured to represent a thunder cloud, or some particular divine attribute or force of nature. The first guess is the most probable. Are we to regard these cherubs, whatever it is they represent, as guardians of the heavenly treasures? It is impossible to say with certainty; but we know that similar winged monsters, such as griffins, harpies, and sphinxes, appear on or near the monuments of all ancient peoples. The columns or obelisks, Jachin and Boaz, were probably representations of the sunbeams. The pomegranate, which was the symbol of the fructifying power of nature, the lily, the palm-tree, and the flower-bud, appear in the temples of many Asiatic deities, and all pertain to the worship of nature. Thus Solomon's temple had much in common with heathen edifices, and slight modifications might have made it a suitable temple for Baal. This need not surprise us, for the ancient religion of the Israelitish tribes was itself a form of nature-worship just as much as the religions of the Canaanites, Phœnicians, Philistines, and other surrounding peoples were. Most of the Israelites certainly saw no harm in these ornaments, since they were not aware of any very great difference between the character of Yahweh and that of Baal, Astarte, or Moloch. But the true children of Moses, men of a spirit akin to Samuel's, were very deeply conscious of such a difference. Men who took their stand on the Ten Commandments were shocked by many of the ancient usages and beliefs common to the Israelites and these other tribes, though perhaps they might themselves have been at a loss sometimes to explain and justify their feeling of aversion.

Whether clearly or obscurely felt by Solomon's contemporaries, it is at any rate a fact that his temple tended to destroy the work of Moses and of Samuel, and to bring the people a step nearer heathendom.

In fact, this tendency is characteristic of Solomon's reign of forty years¹ in all its aspects. Following in the footsteps of his father, he did all that he possibly could to make Israel like other peoples, and to obliterate the special characteristics that marked the tribes amongst which Moses had introduced the worship of Yahweh.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CURSE OF CANAAN.

1 KINGS IX. 15—22; GENESIS IX. 18—27.

WHEN the Egyptian king's daughter married Solomon, her father made her a present of the city of Gezer, with the lands belonging to it.² Such presents were not unusual amongst the royal families of ancient times, and were by no means a mere form, for the princess would receive for her own uses the tribute paid by the inhabitants of the city given her. Gezer lay in all probability north-west of Jerusalem, not far from Beth-Horon.³ It was inhabited by Canaanites, and must have been very strongly situated, since it had managed to retain its independence up to Solomon's accession. It has been conjectured that it lay near the sea, that its inhabitants were pirates, and that the Egyptian king was therefore desirous of overthrowing it in the interests of his own country; but whether this was really so, or whether he conquered it simply for the sake of his son-in-law, we cannot say. In any case the present must have been ex-

¹ 1 Kings xi. 42.

² Compare Vol. II., p. 139.

³ See Map V.

tremely welcome to Solomon. He at once converted Gezer into a fortress, which, together with Beth-Horon and Baalath, covered Judah to the north-west, as Tamar in the desert did to the south-east.

Gezer seems to have been the last Canaanite city which retained its independence in the southern portion of Israel's territory; for though on one occasion we still read of Hittite kings¹ in the history of the northern kingdom, Judah does not appear ever to have come into contact with them again. Indeed, Solomon's predecessors had dealt them very heavy blows in the southern district, Saul having broken the power of the Gibeonites, and David having conquered the Jebusites.

Now when the Israelites had no longer anything to fear from the Canaanites they began to oppress them more and more. Solomon reduced them to absolute slavery, and employed them in fortifying Jerusalem, in building fortresses to command his frontiers and cities in which provisions might be stored in time of war, and also in laying out his pleasure grounds in various districts of the land. The historian adds that Solomon enslaved none of the sons of Israel, but only employed them as soldiers and officers, as ministers and attendants at court, as commanders of war chariots, and cavalry.² This is certainly untrue, however, for the thousands of men who were forced to labour on the various works of which we read in the last chapter,³ must most of them have been Israelites. But there was doubtless a wide difference between the treatment they experienced and that to which the Canaanites had to submit. The latter were never spared and never set free. They were slaves all their lives. Many of them were attached to the temple of Yahweh at Jerusalem, where they had to perform the severest and most menial work, such as drawing water and hewing wood.⁴ Before long

¹ 2 Kings vii. 6.

² 1 Kings ix. 22.

³ See p. 111.

⁴ Compare Vol. II., pp. 140 ff.

there was a special slaves' quarter established on the Ophél at Jerusalem, not far from the temple; and in all probability Solomon presented great gangs of Canaanite slaves to other sanctuaries also. But we must not suppose that all the descendants of the Amorites and other ancient inhabitants of the land were reduced after a time to slavery. On the other hand, many Canaanite families had intermarried with Israelites, and others had risen to wealth and distinction in their midst, and so had several foreigners. Thus, Uriah the Hittite was one of David's most trusted followers,¹ and Araunah, the Jebusite possessed a threshing-floor in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem. Long after Solomon's time, certain distinguished families were still well known to be of Canaanite extraction.² But the fact cast a certain slur upon them, and exposed them to the contempt of the haughty Israelites. This was doubtless true even before the time of Solomon, but much more so afterwards.

The light in which the Israelites of pure blood regarded the relations between themselves and the Canaanites is strikingly exemplified in the following legend, which certainly did not rise before the time of Solomon:³

Noah had three sons, who became the ancestors of all the peoples of the earth. They were called Shem, Ham, and Japhet; and Ham was the father of Canaan. Now, Noah had begun to till the soil, and had planted a vineyard, and once the wine that it produced made him so drunk that he lay naked on the ground in his tent. Then Ham, the father of Canaan, saw him; but instead of turning away his eyes from so shocking a sight, he went to his two brothers outside, and, with a shameless laugh upon his face, told them what a state their father was in. But Shem and Japhet were far from joining in his evil mirth. As soon as they heard what

¹ 2 Samuel xxiii. 39.

² See Vol. II., p. 131.

³ Genesis ix. 18-27.

their brother said, they stretched a cloak across their shoulders, and going into the tent backwards, so as not to see their father as he lay there, they covered him up with it.

When Noah returned to himself he heard what his youngest son had done, and cried out :

A curse upon Canaan !

May he serve his brothers as their lowest slave !

But he blessed Ham's brothers in the following words :—

Blessed be Yahweh, the god of Shem !

May Canaan be his slave !

May God make Japhet extend !

May he dwell in the tents of Shem,

And may Canaan be his slave !

To understand this legend rightly we do not need to know exactly what nations the Israelites regarded as the sons of Shem, of Ham, and of Japhet respectively; still less what were the rules that guided them in making the division.¹ We need only bear in mind that all distant nations were regarded as "sons of Japhet." In the Hebrew word (*japht*) which we have translated *make to extend*, there is a play upon the name "Japhet." Under the name of Ham the writer does not refer to the Hamites in general, but only to the Canaanites; for he repeatedly describes Ham as Canaan's father, and it is upon the latter exclusively that the curse of Noah and the doom of slavery fall. So, too, in speaking of Shem, he does not include all the Semitic peoples, but only Israel; and therefore he does not make Noah say, "Blessed be Shem!" but, "Blessed be Yahweh, the god of Shem!" since it was only Israel that worshipped Yahweh. To understand the significance of the promise that Japhet should dwell in the tents of Shem, that is to say amongst the Israelites,

¹ Compare Vol. I., pp. 122 f.

we must remember what a point the ancient peoples made of keeping themselves separate from each other. It was considered a glorious privilege "to dwell alone," as a certain poet expressed it,¹ "and not to be reckoned amongst the nations." Ancient peoples were so jealous of their land that they could hardly endure the presence of strangers in it; and if a prince allowed foreigners to settle in any of his cities, it was a proof of very special confidence in them. If any considerable number of people from one and the same country availed themselves of such a privilege, they had a special quarter of the city assigned to them in which they offered their wares for sale. So the wish, "May Japhet dwell in the tents of Shem," means: "May the dwellers in distant lands gain the privilege of settling in the cities of Israel, and in that case may the Canaanites serve them too!"

The curse pronounced upon these ancient inhabitants of Israel's territory is the one essential point of the story. The author shows manifest good will towards foreigners in general, with many of whom Israel entered into very friendly relations under Solomon's reign, but he holds up the Canaanites as the one race doomed to slavery.

It follows from the nature of the case that this curse of Canaan would be more heartily responded to after the time of Solomon than before. There is usually bitter hatred between a conquering and a conquered people, especially as long as the former are still to some extent afraid of the latter. It is therefore only natural that the Canaanites should have cherished a violent hatred of the descendants of the invaders before whom their ancestors had been compelled to yield, and that the Israelites should have paid them back in the same coin. But during the two and a half centuries that elapsed between the conquest of Canaan and the reign of Solomon, the new rulers had been compelled to treat

¹ Numbers xxiii. 9.

the old inhabitants with some consideration. And though there had always been a minority who detested the Canaanites and denounced all intermarriages with them, the great majority had found it advantageous to live at peace with them.¹ But when Israel's fame spread far and wide, and the splendour of the court of Jerusalem conferred a lustre upon the whole nation—when the surrounding tribes bowed beneath the sceptre of Yahweh's anointed, and even distant peoples sought his friendship—when the name of Israelite had become an honour, and everyone who bore it felt the dignity it conferred upon him—then the Canaanites could be safely disregarded, then public opinion would no longer have attributed a famine to any wrong inflicted upon them, then it was borne in upon the mind of many an Israelite that the descendants of Canaan were only fit for slaves!

Of course there is nothing intrinsically noble in this national pride of the Israelites. On the contrary, it sometimes appears almost ridiculous. But it was inevitable that when the Israelites became independent and even powerful, under David and Solomon, they should rise greatly in their own estimation, for it lies in human nature to estimate worth by the outward privileges it secures. We must not therefore condemn Israel for this self-exaltation. A people that is conscious of its own strength gives us more hope for the future than one that is habitually cowed. No good can come of a child of servile disposition, that is always cringing or grovelling; but a lad who feels his strength, even if he is a little overbearing, may grow up into a noble man, and may make us forget how unfeeling he sometimes was, when a boy, towards his weaker companions. In the same way, a people that has no sense of its own worth has no future before it.

But in this respect, as in all others, there were great differences amongst the Israelites. The contemptuous conduct

¹ See Vol. II. pp. 203 ff, and Vol. III. p. 20.

of many a shallow Israelite towards the Canaanites was simply the result of his sense of power; but in some cases nobler influences were at work. This very legend shows that it was so. Canaan is cursed and doomed to the lowest slavery in expiation for the sin which Ham committed against his father. But, to appreciate the writer's indignation, we must remember that it was not a simple act of filial irreverence that drew down the punishment. Doubtless even this was an abomination in the writer's mind, and he would have heartily endorsed the proverb-writer's saying:¹

The eye of him who mocks his father,
And cares not to reverence his mother,
The ravens of the valley shall pick it out;
The young eagles shall devour it.

But Canaan was guilty of something still worse than irreverence. He was immodest and unchaste. To understand what the writer means, we must remember that the Israelite laws contain frequent warnings against sins which decency forbids us from so much as naming. These repeated exhortations, together with the emphasis laid upon them and the severity of the penalties they enjoin, show us that the Israelites were in constant danger of sinking below the brutes in this respect, and giving themselves over to the foulest sins. In fact, they show that this danger was not unfrequently realised. Now, the most revolting offences of this description are always called "the abominations of the Canaanites."

The best of the Israelites, therefore, felt an aversion for the tribes they had conquered and oppressed, which was not simply the result of national pride and selfishness, but was based upon a deep moral sense. "Cursed be the infamous race of Canaan!" was a sentiment that had sunk into many hearts.

¹ Proverbs xxx. 17.

When we had brought down the history to David's ascent of the throne, we glanced back upon the period of the Judges,¹ and remarked how deeply the history of religion had been affected by the fact that the unification of the people came about under the guidance of men of the genuine Israelitish stamp, and that Yahweh became the god of Canaan. The age of David and Solomon, which completed the subjection of the old inhabitants of the land, confirmed the boon which had been gained in previous times, and was also favourable in other respects to religious progress. For the two princes in question raised the people of Yahweh to greatness, and thereby increased in no small measure the glory of the god himself. All David's wars were wars of Yahweh. When Israel conquered the foe, then Israel's god triumphed over the gods of the humbled tribes. When Yahweh's anointed showed his might or displayed his wisdom, and spread the fame of himself and his people far and wide, must not everyone exclaim with Hiram and the queen of Sheba, "Praised be Yahweh!"² Did not the king's commerce by land and sea make known the name of Israel's god in distant lands? And thus the way was prepared for the belief in Yahweh, not only as Israel's national god, but as the ruler of all the world—a belief that we shall actually see hereafter springing up amongst the most advanced of his worshippers.

Moreover the horizon of the Israelites was extended under David and Solomon. They became acquainted with many different nations, some of them very distant ones, and this in itself dispelled many of their contracted views, many of their prejudices, and gave them greater mental breadth. And, again, the cultivation of music and other arts, such as sculpture and architecture, must have exercised a humanising and elevating influence upon the Israelites. Increased luxury

¹ See Vol. II., pp. 397 ff.

² 1 Kings v. 7, x. 9.

produced new wants and drove men to devise means of satisfying them; and this again would stimulate industry and encourage the exercise of handicrafts. After Solomon's time it would have been impossible to carry away all the smiths out of Israel, as the Philistines had done of old! The cultivation of "wisdom" and the taste for inventing and guessing riddles, which began to spread amongst the citizens as well as the courtiers, bears witness to the growth of intellectual power. In a word, the worshippers of Yahweh became more civilised in this century, and it is hardly necessary to say that this fact exercised a great influence upon the conception which they formed of their god.

But for all that Israel would have trodden the path of the heathens, under the guidance of David and Solomon, and Yahweh would have become essentially such a deity as the Baals were, had there been none to insist, above everything, upon the moral demands of Israel's god. Henceforth we shall call these men the followers of Moses, because they built upon the foundation laid by him in the Ten Commandments, and so worked in his spirit.

We have already remarked that there was much in the principles of David's government, as well as Solomon's, to which these followers of Moses objected. They themselves were, in many respects, very one-sided, for not only were they offended by the luxury of the court, the extent of the royal harem, and the idolatrous temples erected by Solomon, but they opposed the culture of the fine arts in almost every form,¹ and regarded the desire for knowledge as sinful pride.² In short, they looked askance upon everything that was highly valued by mankind in general. "Yahweh stands up," said a prophet who lived two centuries after the time of Solomon,³ "Yahweh stands up against everything that is high,

¹ Compare Vol. I. pp. 75 ff. ² Compare Vol. I. pp. 43 ff.

³ Isaiah ii. 12-17.

against all the mighty cedars of Lebanon and all the oaks of Bashan, against all the lofty mountains and high hills, against every proud turret and all fortified walls, against Tarshish ships and costly furniture.¹ Then shall the loftiness of mankind be bowed down and the pride of men be humbled, that Yahweh alone may be exalted." This attack upon Tarshish ships is equivalent to a denunciation, in our own day, of "haughty East Indiamen," or "presumptuous Cunard steamers," for instance! Solomon's war-chariots, cavalry, and fortifications were an offence and a scandal to the followers of Moses, and made the splendour of the temple he had built to Yahweh still more intolerable in their eyes.

Their views of life then were contracted in the extreme, and their vehemence in decrying everything but religion and morality, as they conceived them, provokes our opposition, while there is much that attracts us in the policy of David and Solomon. But we must never forget that the prophets had only too much reason to dread the baneful influence of worldly things, that if they fell into exaggerations they were of the noblest description, and that it was they who rescued the moral worship of Yahweh, Israel's most precious jewel, from the whirlpool of heathendom.

The thought that Yahweh values moral worth above all else finds emphatic expression in the twenty-fourth psalm. We have already quoted² the closing verses, which probably contain the words that were chanted as the ark was borne back into the temple after a campaign; "Lift up your doors, ye everlasting gates! that the glorious king may enter. Who is this glorious king? Yahweh of hosts!" But the words which were made to precede them, evidently at a later period, breathe a far more exalted conception of Yahweh's being than we should ever gather from those cries of triumph. They run as follows: ³

¹ The translation is here conjectural.

² See p. 82, 83.

³ Verses 1—6.

The earth and its fulness are Yahweh's
The world and its inhabitants.
For it was he who founded it on the seas
And established it on the rivers.
Who may ascend the hill of Yahweh?
Who may stand in his holy place?
He who has pure hands and a clean heart,
Who has not been bold in deceit
And has never sworn to a lie.
He shall be blessed by Yahweh
And saved by the god who delivers him.
Such is the race of them that seek thee,
That seek thy face, O god of Jacob!¹

If we go to the root of the matter we see that this god of Jacob is not the same being as the Yahweh of hosts whose might in war was his claim to honour;² but the Israelites did not perceive it, and united the two conceptions together.

So as long as moral strength is counted a treasure against which no culture, art, or knowledge can be allowed to weigh, so long must we exalt the party of the prophets, with all its one-sidedness, above that of David and Solomon; for the prophets supplied the indispensable counterpoise to a movement which, if left to itself, threatened danger to the "one thing needful."

We shall see from the following chapter that they had power to make themselves felt.

¹ After an amended version.

² Verse 8.

CHAPTER IX.

J E R O B O A M .

1 KINGS XI. 26—XIV. 20.¹

EVEN under David's reign many of the Israelites, especially amongst the northern tribes, had given unmistakable proofs of disaffection; but under Solomon their complaints became far louder. No wonder! It is true that Solomon was celebrated far and wide for his wealth and power, and that his rule was truly magnificent. But his lavish court and splendid works could only be supported by an enormous expenditure, and this fell upon his subjects, in the shape of taxes and enforced service. The kingdom was divided into twelve districts, each of which had to take its turn in meeting the expenses of the royal court for one month,² and the governors must often have found it a hard task to supply the vast quantity of provisions needed for the royal table.³ Moreover, thousands upon thousands of Israelites were compelled to work upon the palaces, the temples, the fortresses, and all the other buildings raised by Solomon, and for these services they received no wages; or, if some small allowance was made them, it did but increase the burden of taxation more. The fact that Solomon surrendered a part of his territory to Hiram in payment of a debt, proves conclusively that the imposts were already as heavy as his subjects could bear; for such a king would never take such a step unless all his other resources were exhausted.

Nor is it unnatural that these grievances should have been more keenly felt in the North than in the South. In the first place we must remember that "Israel" or the "house of Joseph," on the one hand, and Judah, on the other, had

¹ 2 Chronicles x. 1—xi. 4.² Kings iv. 7 ff.³ Compare p. 95.

really formed two separate groups of tribes ever since the conquest of Canaan. They were conscious of their relationship, but they had never been really united in the desert, they had penetrated Canaan from opposite directions, and had had nothing to do with each other in the period of the judges until at last compelled by imperious necessity to make common cause. The tie between North and South, therefore, had never been a close one, and Ephraim and the surrounding tribes were by no means prepared to put up with the despotism of a king who sprang from Judah. Moreover it was quite in the spirit of antiquity for a king to treat his own relatives and, next to them, his fellow-tribesmen, with far more leniency than any others, while all the advantages which might be derived from the neighbourhood of a luxurious court naturally fell to the district about Jerusalem.

Once during Solomon's lifetime the discontent had broken out. The leader of the rebels was an Ephraimite—Jeroboam, the son of Nebat—who stood high in the esteem of Solomon himself, and had been appointed by him to superintend the labourers from the north of the kingdom, who were employed in fortifying the castle at Jerusalem called the Millo.¹ But Jeroboam's attempt to drive Solomon from his throne was unsuccessful, and he had to fly for his life to Egypt, where he was hospitably received by the king, Shishak, who was doubtless afraid that his neighbour Solomon might become dangerously powerful.²

This is the only insurrection against Solomon mentioned by history, and it appears to have been speedily suppressed. The mighty name of the warrior David, and the brilliance of his son's court, so overawed and dazzled the masses that Solomon was allowed to die in peace. But what he had sown his son Rehoboam reaped.³ As soon as he ascended the throne it became clear that he would not establish his royal authority

See pp. 5, 6.

¹ 1 Kings xi. 26—28, 40.

² 1 Kings xii. 1—20.

without some difficulty; for whereas on David's death all Israel had followed the example of Jerusalem and recognised his son Solomon as king, the northern tribes began, on this occasion, to make difficulties. They invited Rehoboam, who had been acknowledged at Jerusalem immediately on Solomon's death, to come to Shechem, the ancient capital of the northern tribes, to be crowned there also. The fact was that they only meant to recognise him as king upon their own conditions, which they preferred stating at Shechem rather than at Jerusalem. So when Rehoboam had accepted the invitation, they sent their chiefs to lay their grievances and their demands before him. Their spokesman was Jeroboam, who had now returned from Egypt.

The attitude of the northern tribes was certainly not encouraging, but the new king might probably have allayed the impending storm had he acted sensibly. The malcontents had evidently not resolved to refuse allegiance upon any conditions, for they expressly declared that if the king would lighten the heavy yoke of taxation and compulsory service which his father had laid upon them they would serve him faithfully. Rehoboam replied that in three days he would give them an answer. Meanwhile he desired to consult his advisers. Their opinions differed considerably, though they were all agreed on the main point, and were indignant with the conduct of the Israelites. What unheard-of audacity to use such language to a king! Conditions indeed! Why they ought to be only too thankful that a grandson of the hero who had delivered Israel, and a son of the sage and illustrious Solomon, who had spread the fame of the people far and wide, was left to rule over them! None of the counsellors thought for a moment of suggesting that Rehoboam should submit to the dictates of his subjects. But as to the exact answer he should give, opinions differed. The old and cautious ministers who had supported Solomon gave the

crafty advice: "Submit to the people to-day! Give them good words and promise all they ask! Then they will submit to you ever afterwards." But Rehoboam's own friends, who were rash and headstrong, thought this would be unseemly language for a king, and cried: "Give these shameless upstarts the answer they deserve, and say; 'My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins; if he laid a heavy yoke upon you, I will make it heavier yet; and if he chastised your obstinacy with rods, I will lash you with scourges!'" That was the answer that pleased Rehoboam best! "Ah," he thought, "those are the words that suit the lips of a king!" So he gave this answer to the chiefs; but the Israelites, it seemed, felt that they could dispense with him better than his courtiers had imagined; for hardly had the haughty answer been uttered when the signal of revolt was given in the cry: "What have we to do with David! We are no kin to Jesse's son! Henceforth let David rule his own house! To your tents, O Israel!" In vain did Rehoboam attempt to pacify the assembly. His messenger, the chancellor Adoram, was stoned to death by the infuriated people, and he himself, in terror of his life, fled with all speed to Jerusalem. Thus had pride gone before a fall. Judah alone remained faithful to Rehoboam, and all the other tribes proclaimed Jeroboam king of Israel.

After the disruption, the northern kingdom retained the name of Israel; and it had the fullest right to do so, for it is not improbable that the name originally belonged to the inhabitants of central Canaan, Ephraim and Manasseh, and only spread to the other tribes by degrees.¹ And even if "Israel" had been the common name of all the tribes from time immemorial, still Judah was but small in comparison with the rest of the kingdom, and "Judah ought

¹ 1 Samuel xi. 8, xvii. 52, xviii. 16; 2 Samuel xi. 11, xii. 8, xxi. 2; 1 Kings iv. 20, 25.

to return to Israel" would have been a more reasonable cry than "Israel ought to join Judah."—It is but natural that we should find ourselves unable to draw the boundary line between the sister kingdoms with precision; and, moreover, it was constantly changing. The Benjamites would certainly have preferred to belong to the northern kingdom, rather than to Judah. From ancient times they had always formed a part of the house of Joseph,¹ and the legend has good reason for making Benjamin Joseph's full brother. Moreover it was but natural that Saul's fellow-tribesmen should feel no great love for David's house. But Jerusalem lay in the territory of Benjamin, and it followed from the very nature of the case that the region round about David's city should be welded, so to speak, into Judah. Thus it happened that while the more northern Benjamites rallied to the flag of Joseph, the southern portion of the tribe became part of Judah. And to Judah, of course, belonged the families of Simeonites who dwelt in the south-west corner of the land. They had, however, gradually ceased to constitute a separate tribe, and had been completely amalgamated with the Judæans. So, too, had the Kenites and other foreign tribes who had maintained their position in the South ever since the conquest. Rehoboam, then, was only acknowledged by one important tribe, to which, however, the tributary Edomites must be added. All the other conquered districts, from Moab to the towns of Syria, belonged to Jeroboam—as long as he could keep them!

The separation of the kingdoms took place about the year 978 B.C.

The serious objections entertained by the stricter followers of Moses to Solomon's principles of government will have prepared us to find them seconding the attempt of Jeroboam. A reminiscence of the part they took is preserved in the following story.²

¹ 2 Samuel xix, 20.

² 1 Kings xi. 29—40.

When Jeroboam was superintendent of the Ephraimite workmen who were fortifying Jerusalem, the prophet Ahijah of Shiloh met him once outside the city. No one else was present, and the prophet seized hold of a new cloak which he was wearing, tore it into twelve pieces, offered ten of them to Jeroboam, and cried—"Thus saith Yahweh, Israel's god : I will rend the kingdom out of Solomon's hand and will give ten tribes to you. One tribe I will let him keep for David's sake and for Jerusalem's sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes, but the rest will I take away from him, because he has served idols and has not kept my commandments as David did. And yet I will not bring Solomon himself to destruction, but from his son will, I take away the kingdom—except over one tribe, that my servant David may always have a light burning in Jerusalem. And as I have chosen you to be king over Israel, so will I keep your house upon the throne for ever, if you will but obey my commandments as my servant David did. And his posterity, for all the reasons I have said, I will humble—but not for ever."

This story breathes exactly the spirit of the historian who gives it. Jerusalem appears as the one chosen city of Yahweh's worship, which it certainly was not in Solomon's days, when people still sacrificed wherever they liked. Such language is especially inappropriate in the mouth of an Ephraimite like Ahijah. And again, the extreme exaltation of David indicates a later age. It was easy for an Israelite who lived about the time of the Captivity to make Ahijah predict that Rehoboam rather than Solomon would lose the greater part of his territory, and that David's house would continue to sit upon the throne of Judah ; but Ahijah himself could not have foreseen these things ; nor did anyone deliberately contemplate the separation of the people into two sections, though many would have rejoiced to see David's house superseded by some other. The writer looked upon

the past in the light of his own time. He was convinced that Solomon's idolatry was the sole cause of his rejection by Yahweh ; but in the tenth century before Christ Israel was not yet the people it afterwards became. It was not yet prepared to sacrifice everything for its faith, nor did it regard the questions of religion as the only true questions of life. Solomon would have brought his throne into but little danger had he simply worshipped foreign gods. His proceedings in this respect were acceptable to the masses of his people, and only gave offence to a comparatively small band of zealots. What really raised his subjects against him was, as we have seen, the weight of the taxation. The disciples of Moses only played a secondary part in the revolution which wrenched the greater part of his kingdom from Rehoboam, but no doubt they threw their whole strength into the movement, hoping that a change would be an improvement.

Such a party as theirs, however, is destined to constant disappointment, for their comparatively pure and exalted principles could only be put into immediate practice at the expense of the nation's prosperity and independence. By attempting such a course Samuel brought Israel to the brink of destruction. Saul found himself compelled to desert the cause of the zealots. David and Solomon had never identified themselves with them, and it was hardly likely that Jeroboam would do so now. No doubt they hoped great things from him, but they were soon undeceived, for he, too, disappointed their expectations.

The writer of Kings brands him with infamy as the prince who set up the golden bulls at Dan and Bethel, and appointed priests who were not Levites. But we must not simply adopt his judgment unchallenged ; for he measured the deeds of all the former kings by the standard of his own times, and tested everything by the law of Deuteronomy. This is quite unfair, for in the tenth century before Christ this book did not exist,

and even the most highly cultivated Israelites had not so much as thought of its special principles. We shall see, however, that even when judged by the best of his own contemporaries, Jeroboam was condemned for his conduct.

Of course he was compelled to turn his attention to religious matters very soon after his ascent of the throne. His line of action was in full accord with the spirit of antiquity. David and Solomon had already shown him how to identify the interests of religion with those of the king. The temple at Jerusalem, as the most magnificent of Yahweh's sanctuaries, would naturally attract a number of pilgrims even from the northern kingdom, and would thus keep up relations between Jeroboam's subjects and those of the house of David which must be displeasing and might easily become dangerous to the northern monarch. It became necessary, therefore, for Jeroboam to establish magnificent temples in his own territory, to prevent the Israelites from going to Jerusalem. To this the prophets had certainly no objection, but what did offend both them and the other zealots was that Yahweh was openly worshipped in these new temples under the form of a bull; for when the king restored the famous and venerable sanctuaries of Dan¹ in the northern and Bethel² in the southern corner of his land, he set up a gilt image of a bull in each.

The meaning of these images we know with moderate certainty. It is a mistake to suppose, as some have done, that Jeroboam was introducing an Egyptian form of worship into Israel. For in Egypt the worship was offered to living bulls, Apis and Mnevis, and the *image* of a bull is quite another thing. Nor could a religion so completely foreign to the ideas of the Israelites, as the Egyptian bull-worship, have been imposed by the simple fiat of the king. Not even an oriental monarch has such power as that! We may depend upon it

¹ See Vol. II., pp. 178 ff.

² See Vol. I., pp. 231 ff.

that these images were of Canaanite or ancient Israelite origin, or perhaps both. The fact is that the bull or buffalo was regarded by many ancient peoples as the symbol of strength and majesty. Hence many deities such as Moloch, Baal, and Astarte are represented with horns. So, too, the image of the bull appears in connection with the worship of Yahweh, which is not at all surprising when we remember that in the popular conception there was no such very great difference between Yahweh and Moloch or Baal. Had not the altars of Yahweh horns? And was not the brazen sea in the forecourt of Solomon's temple supported by twelve brazen oxen? Nor is there the smallest doubt that Jeroboam's images represented Yahweh. The tradition, accordingly, makes him say when he sets them up, "Here, O Israel is your god, that delivered you out of Egypt." Even the writer of Kings, utterly as he detested the images, admitted that they were intended to represent Yahweh. It is certain, therefore, that this was so.

To understand Jeroboam's conduct we must remember that when Moses introduced the worship of Yahweh amongst the Israelite tribes they already possessed a motley assemblage of religious ideas and usages, and had many images of gods. The commandment "Thou shalt make no image of a god!" whether due to Moses or not, was at any rate observed by very few. The majority of the Israelites, especially in the North, where they were more strongly intermingled with the Canaanites, doubtless had images of every kind, and some of them in the form of a bull. Those who protested against the use of images in the worship of Yahweh had evidently great influence with the people, for in the temple of Solomon no image of Yahweh was to be found, and it appears that at Dan and Bethel there had been none before Jeroboam's time; but even then all manner of symbols of the deity were in use. Were there not two great obelisks standing before the temple at Jerusalem? Were not images of the sun, *asherahs*, and

anointed stones to be found everywhere by the altars of Yahweh? Was not the temple itself ornamented with the significant forms of cherubs and many another creature? Was not a *teraphim* to be found in the houses of zealous worshippers of Yahweh, and in many a temple also? What wonder then that the great masses felt no scruple in making use of images of Yahweh!

But for all that Jeroboam's action marked a step backwards; for the disuse of direct representations of Yahweh was at least a step towards recognising the spiritual nature of the deity—an attempt to rise above the low religious level at which the mass of the people stood. Jeroboam, then, favoured the worse at the expense of the better, and though he thereby won the favour of the majority of his subjects and that of his Phœnician neighbours also, yet he sacrificed the respect of the more enlightened.

Other regulations concerning public worship were made at the time when these images were set up. In the first place the great yearly feast of harvest, commonly called the feast of tabernacles, was fixed by Jeroboam on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, whereas in Jerusalem it was celebrated just a month earlier. The writer of Kings, who regards the time observed at Jerusalem as prescribed by Yahweh himself, and therefore inviolable, is greatly shocked by Jeroboam's proceeding. But there was really no harm in it at all. Jerusalem was not then the sole norm of religious usages; and the probability is that in the North the feast was usually celebrated as a matter of fact in the eighth month, after the end of the grape harvest, and that Jeroboam simply sanctioned the existing usage.

But the historian's list of grievances is not yet exhausted. "Jeroboam," he says, "made a temple with *bamahs* in it, and entrusted the priesthood there to men who were not of the

tribe of Levi, but were taken from any of the tribes indifferently.¹ It seems that a *bamah* was a sort of wooden altar in the form of a cone, and the sanctuaries in which these *bamahs* were erected were themselves often called *bamahs* after them. Now in Jeroboam's time such temples and altars existed everywhere. Did not Solomon offer his first sacrifice as king upon the celebrated *bamah* at Gibeon? And priests who were not Levites already existed in abundance, so that the king had no need to appoint them for the first time. Nor did he depose Levites from their office, as the writer of the Chronicles says he did;² for we know that the altar of the image at Dan was attended not only before but after Jeroboam's time, down to the fall of the kingdom by descendants of Moses.³ Nor was this the only sanctuary in the northern kingdom at which Levites sacrificed and consulted the deity. They must have officiated at Bethel too; for otherwise the writer of Kings would not have confined himself to stating that non-Levitical priests were appointed at the "house of *bamahs*." It may be true that some of the priestly offices, which had been in the hands of Levites before the time of Jeroboam, subsequently fell to families from other tribes; but if so, it was not because the king desired it, since it was his interest to attach the old and influential families to himself; it was because the Levites themselves did not choose to preside over a mode of worship which was inconsistent with their own ideas. Few, however, would be equal to so great a sacrifice. Indeed we could hardly expect it of them, for though Jeroboam's conduct may have seemed reprehensible to them, it cannot have appeared by any means so shocking and wicked as it did to the Israelites of the seventh century B.C., who had adopted the law of Deuteronomy as their standard.

The king took one more step with reference to public

¹ After an amended version of 1 Kings xii. 31.

² 2 Chronicles xi. 14, 15, xiii. 9.

³ See Vol. II., pp. 178—182.

worship, which gave offence to many ; and that was making an altar out of hewn stones or metal which was led up to by steps. This could give no offence to the devotees in the seventh century before Christ, for in their days there was an elaborately-wrought altar in the temple of Jerusalem itself, and they never objected to it; but it was in direct opposition to the earlier usage which prescribed low altars made of earth or unhewn stone.¹

Against this unhallowed altar, then, the following legend is directed :²

Once when Jerooboam was celebrating the great feast at Bethel, he stood in person by the altar, and was about to offer sacrifice when a Judæan prophet stepped forward from the crowd and uttered the dread prophecy : " O altar, altar, thus saith Yahweh ! In time to come a scion of David's house, Josiah by name, shall come and sacrifice the priests of the *bamahs*, and burn human bones upon you ! And, as a proof of it, this day a miracle shall come to pass. You shall be cleft in two at the command of Yahweh, and the ashes that lie upon you shall be spilt." When Jerooboam heard these words he burst into fury, and, standing on the altar steps, he stretched out his hand and cried, " Seize him ! " But his hand was stiffened, and he could not draw it back ; and at that very moment, behold ! the altar was cleft in two, and the ashes were spilt on either side, just as the man of God had said ! The king cried in terror, " Pray to Yahweh for me, that my hand may be restored." The prophet complied, and Jerooboam's hand was at once restored, like the other. Upon this the king besought him to go home with him and eat with him before returning to his own land, and promised him rich presents also. But the prophet answered, " Though you should give me half your house, I could not go in with you, for Yahweh has forbidden me to

¹ See p. 114.

² 1 Kings xiii.

eat bread or drink water here ; and my god has commanded me also to return by a different way from that by which I came." And accordingly he set out at once upon his journey.

Now there dwelt in Bethel an aged prophet whose sons had witnessed all this scene, and when they came home and told their father what had taken place he asked them immediately which way the man of Judah had gone back ; and when they told him, he ordered them to saddle his ass with all speed. Then he mounted his beast and hurried after the stranger, whom he found sitting under the sacred oak.¹ He asked him whether he was the man of God from Judah ; and, finding that he was, he asked him to come back and share his meal. The Judæan gave him the same answer as he had given the king, whereupon the other replied, "But I too am a prophet, and the angel of Yahweh commanded me to invite you to eat with me." The Judæan allowed himself to be imposed upon by the lie, and went back with his companion to Bethel.

Now as they were sitting at table, the host, in obedience to a revelation from his god, suddenly cried out to the stranger, "Thus says Yahweh : Because you have disobeyed my commandment and have taken food and drink in this place, you shall not be laid in the tomb of your fathers." When the meal was over the Judæan prophet mounted an ass and returned on the way to his own land ; but as he was going he met a lion which hurled him from his beast and killed him, and then stood quietly by the body together with the ass, which he had not injured in any way. As soon as the old prophet heard this he rode to the spot, placed the body of the Judæan on his ass, and carried it back to Bethel. There he mourned over him and had the customary dirge, "Alas, my brother !" chanted for him, and then buried him

¹ See Vol. I., p. 252 ; Vol. II., p. 287.

in his own grave and commanded his sons to lay him to rest in the same place when he should die himself, for all that this Judæan had foretold concerning the altar and the *bamah*-temples in the cities of Samaria would surely come to pass.

That the legend was brought into its present shape after the reform of Josiah is obvious ; but its kernel is certainly much more ancient. This is shown, for instance, by the fact that the narrator misses the real point of the old legend, which he remodels. The unlawful altar was the original cause of offence, but our writer introduced the *bamah*-temples, which in his eyes were far worse than the altar, as the main object of the prophetic rebuke. In making the prophet speak of the cities of Samaria he falls into a great mistake, for, in Jeroboam's time, Samaria, so far from being the capital of the kingdom, did not so much as exist. Our story was evidently attached to a certain grave in Bethel, known as the grave of the man of God from Judah. Why had not the prophet whose bones lay there been allowed to rest in his own family sepulchre? The legend answered that he owed his fate to his disobedience, and then wove around this central thought the motley garment which now clothes it. Strange as the story of this man's trespass of Yahweh's command appears to us, we shall find a companion picture to it in the following chapter.

We know little of Jeroboam's reign except with regard to his measures for regulating worship. As a matter of course he waged war against Judah. The book of Kings tells us that immediately after the division of the kingdom Rehoboam brought an army into the field with the intention of reducing the northern tribes to submission again, but that the prophet Shemaiah dissuaded the Judæans and their king from making war upon their brethren, inasmuch as all that had happened

had been ordained by Yahweh.¹ This account makes it appear as if Rehoboam had had it in his power to expel Jeroboam from Israel, and was only restrained from doing so by religious considerations, inasmuch as he regarded the revolt of the ten tribes as a well-merited punishment. But this reverses the real course of events. It was Jeroboam who attempted to conquer Jerusalem really. It was probably at his instigation that the Egyptian king Shishak made a descent upon Judah about five years after Solomon's death. It appears, however, that Rehoboam succeeded in buying off this powerful enemy. At any rate he retained his independence, though he was forced to give up his treasures.²

Without the help of such an ally as the king of Egypt, Jeroboam did not feel strong enough to subjugate Judah; nor does the position he occupied with regard to the different districts of his own country appear always to have been equally satisfactory. So at least we may gather from his repeated change of residence. At first he established himself at Shechem, then at Penuel in the Transjordanic region,³ and finally at Tirzah, a place that probably lay not far from Shechem, and was greatly beautified by Jeroboam and his successors.⁴ Moreover, the Syrian provinces revolted from him. Even in Solomon's time Damascus had become independent,⁵ and after the division of Israel it became easier for the vigorous rulers of this city to extend their power. Accordingly we find them styled kings of Syria not long after Jeroboam's death; and even before that time, Abijah, king of Judah, had entered into an alliance with one of them against Jeroboam.⁶

On the whole, then, Jeroboam's reign was not prosperous, and his son, Nadab, who succeeded him upon the throne,

¹ 1 Kings xii. 21—24.

² 1 Kings xiv. 25—30.

³ 1 Kings xii. 25.

⁴ Song of Solomon, vi. 4.

⁵ 1 Kings xi. 23—25.

⁶ 1 Kings xv. 18, 19.

was soon to find how insecurely his dynasty was seated. For as he was besieging the Philistine city of Gibbethon, in the second year of his reign, he was bereft of life and throne by the hand of Baasha, of the tribe of Issachar.¹ Of course the historian brought the speedy fall of Jeroboam's house into connection with the worship of images ; and it seemed very natural to make the same Ahijah who had foretold Jeroboam's exaltation to the throne also announce his doom. Such is the purpose of the following story.

Jeroboam's son, Abijah, had fallen sick. The king, in deep anxiety as to the result, suggested to his wife that she should disguise herself, go with a present to Shiloh, and consult the prophet Ahijah. She complied with his request, and took her journey to Shiloh. Now, Ahijah was blind with age, but he did not even need the use of his eyes to recognise his visitor in spite of her disguise. What did her precautions avail ? Did she think they would mislead a man whom God instructed ? Yahweh had already forewarned Ahijah who it was that was coming to see him, and what she was about to ask. At the same time, he had put an answer into his mouth. So as soon as ever the prophet heard the footsteps of the queen within his door, he cried, "Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam ! Whereto does this strange clothing serve ? I have a hard message to deliver. Tell your husband this from Yahweh : I have exalted you to be prince over Israel, but you have not obeyed me as David, who did nothing but what was right in my eyes, obeyed me. You have made strange gods and images, which are an abomination to me, and you have rejected me. Wherefore I will bring destruction upon Jeroboam's house, and will utterly root it out from Israel. Whosoever of his descendants dies in the city, the dogs shall devour him ; and whosoever perishes in the country, the birds shall eat him ! And do

¹ 1 Kings xv. 27.

you go straightway home; and, as you enter the city, the boy shall die. It is well for him; for all Israel shall bewail him, and he alone of Jeroboam's descendants shall be buried honourably; and in him alone does Yahweh still see any good! And not only Jeroboam's house shall be rooted out, but Yahweh shall smite all Israel, because of the *asherahs* with which they provoke him, and they shall be like a broken reed drifting on the water. Yahweh will carry Israel captive beyond the Euphrates. And all this shall come to pass because of Jeroboam's sin!" Ahijah's prophecy concerning the child full soon came true, for, as Jeroboam's wife entered the capital, Tirzah, Abijah died.

The historian himself evidently composed this speech of Ahijah's, for not only does it mention the transportation of Israel beyond the Euphrates, but it misses the real nature of Jeroboam's offence. Ahijah is made to tax the king with serving other gods, with rejecting Yahweh, and with making *asherahs*. Now, nobody saw any harm in this last practice, in the tenth century before Christ, and we saw but now that setting up the bulls was not by any means rejecting the worship of Yahweh; but in the seventh century B.C. the worship of images and the worship of other gods than Yahweh, were completely identified, as they are in the Ten Commandments, according to the version current at that time and afterwards. The two practices are there regarded as one and the same.¹

Although the best of Jeroboam's contemporaries were opposed to the images, not only did the great mass of the people hail them with acclamation, but even the prophets were soon reconciled to them. It is very remarkable that, although great numbers of prophets laboured in Israel during the next two centuries, and exercised a most powerful influence, yet, as far as we can tell, not one of them ever

¹ Deuteronomy v. 7-10; Exodus xx. 3-6; compare Vol. II. p. 96.

uttered a word against the images, and neither Elijah nor Elisha protested against them.

The fact is that before long far more important questions were at stake than whether Yahweh might or might not be lawfully worshipped under the form of a bull.

CHAPTER X.

A H A B.

1 KINGS XV. 25—XVI., XX. 1—XXII. 40.

BAASHA, who mounted the throne of Israel after rooting out the house of Jeroboam, appears to have been especially distinguished for his valour.¹ All that we know of him is that he vigorously prosecuted the war with Judah, whence we may infer that one of the chief grievances against Jeroboam and his son was their failure to subjugate this kingdom. With a view to compelling the southern district to unite itself to Israel, Baasha built a fortress at Ramah, to cut off the commercial intercourse of Judah with the North. At this time Asa was king of Judah, and the measures taken by Baasha reduced him to such straits that he sent a handsome present to Benhadad, the Syrian king, who was Baasha's ally, and implored him to turn his arms against Israel. The Syrian complied, fell upon Baasha's rear, and conquered the northern districts as far down as the sea of Chinnereth. Upon this Baasha was compelled to relinquish his project against Judah, and return with his army to Tirzah. Asa immediately demolished the castle at Ramah, and fortified Gibeah of Benjamin and Mizpah with the materials of which it was built, and thereby protected his northern frontier against future invasion.²

In other respects Baasha appears to have adopted Jero-

¹ 1 Kings xvi. 5.

² 1 Kings xv. 16—22.

Joash's policy during the four-and-twenty years of his reign. The writer of Kings tells us that a certain prophet named Jehu, the son of Hanani, announced his fall, because he worshipped the golden bulls as his predecessors had done. But his disasters in war no doubt undermined his power more than the line he took in religious matters did. He himself, however, maintained his seat on the throne till his death, but his son Elah had not reigned two years before he was murdered, together with all his relatives who were in Tirzah, by Zimri, the captain of half his war chariots. We know nothing of him except that when the conspiracy broke out his army was besieging Gibbethon, and he himself was holding a festival and was drunk.

The conspirator apparently went to work hap-hazard, for he had not even made sure of the troops. They were by no means inclined to recognise him, and proclaimed their captain, Omri, king. He immediately marched upon Tirzah, where Zimri was as careless in taking measures to preserve his crown as he had been headlong in seizing it. At any rate, the capital fell into Omri's hands within seven days of Elah's murder, and Zimri withdrew into the palace and then set it on fire. The writer of Kings concludes his brief account of this adventurer by declaring that he fell because he had sinned against Yahweh in walking in the way of Jeroboam, and so seducing Israel. But this only shows that the accusation which he brings successively against almost all the Israelite kings was not based upon an adequate knowledge of the facts, but was simply an inference from the fate which overtook the princes and dynasties in question. For further details concerning Zimri, as well as his predecessors and successors, we are referred to the "Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel"—a work which must have contained a great amount of very valuable information, but which has unfortunately been lost.

Zimri's death was far from placing Omri in undisputed possession of the crown, which was contested four years by a certain Tibni. After the death of this rival Omri remained on the throne eight years. He was more successful in establishing his dynasty than his predecessors had been, for his family swayed the sceptre of Israel for half a century. All that we are told of his reign is that he purchased from a certain Semer a hill upon which he built a city, which he called Samaria. This place became the capital of the kingdom, and played an important part in the history of the people. The derivation here given of the name Samaria, which means "watchmen," is certainly incorrect. Perhaps a watch-tower originally stood upon the site.

The Judæan historian, to whom we owe the book of Kings, looks with strong disapprobation upon all the monarchs of north Israel. According to him, they were all of them godless men, for they committed "the sin of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat." But the house of Omri he holds in more especial detestation. And no wonder! For if Jeroboam had violated the principles of the Mosaic school by raising the golden bulls, Omri's race went infinitely further in the evil path by openly encouraging the worship of the Phœnician god Baal. It is highly probable that Omri himself took the lead in this religious policy; but we have no particulars on the point. Tradition makes up for its silence concerning Omri by the fulness with which it treats his son and successor, Ahab.

The name of this prince occurs in several narratives, which differ widely in character. Some of them give us historical accounts, only slightly coloured by legendary embellishments or the religious views of the writer; whereas others simply give us a poetical version of the internal history of Israel under Omri's house. Only the former class of narratives will be treated at present. The others compose a prophetic epos, which we shall reserve for another chapter.¹

¹ 1 Kings xvii—xix.

The path in which Ahab trod, following the steps of his father, was that of Solomon. He encouraged commerce and industry, fortified a number of cities, laid out pleasure grounds, and built himself a palace, richly adorned with ivory.¹ All this encouraged the cultivation of art and the pursuit of knowledge; and it is not without significance that just about this time people began to get over their superstitious terror of everything that had been laid under the ban. A striking instance is furnished by the rebuilding of Jericho. Ever since the conquest, this city had lain in ruins, with its fruitful land untilled, because it had been consecrated to Yahweh; but now a certain rich and enlightened inhabitant of Bethel ventured to rebuild the place. It is true that the ignorant multitude saw a sign of Yahweh's wrath in the death of two of this man's children,² but the fact only serves to emphasise the victory won by enlightenment over a primeval superstition.

Ahab naturally contracted a close alliance with the Phœnicians. In the first place he sought their support against the Syrians, who had again conquered some of the Israelitish cities during his father's reign,³ and were constantly threatening the land still further. Moreover, the industry, enterprise, and skill of the Phœnicians formed the model after which Ahab regulated his own government. He had married Jezebel, a daughter of the Tyrian prince (whom the book of Kings,⁴ probably by mistake, calls the ruler of the Sidonians), and, since he was a man of weak character himself, he was completely ruled by his ambitious wife. Under her influence he chose an obvious means of drawing still closer the tie between his own people and the Phœnicians by favouring the Tyrian religion. So, while Bethel and Dan still remained the centres of the worship of Yahweh, he

¹ 1 Kings xxii. 39. ² 1 Kings xvi. 34; compare Vol. II. p. 130.

³ 1 Kings xx. 34.

⁴ 1 Kings xvi. 31.

founded a temple for Baal at Samaria, raised an altar to him there, and reared a great *asherah* in front of the sanctuary.

Here we may say a few words on the subject of *asherahs*, as to which students of ancient religions are not quite agreed. What an *asherah* was seems to be clear enough. It was the trunk of a tree stripped of its branches, or a pillar that resembled such a trunk in form; and it was placed by the side of an altar or in front of a temple. In this sense the word (which the Authorised Version always mistranslates "a grove") is constantly used. So far all are agreed; but the question is whether "*Asherah*" was properly speaking the name of a goddess of whom this pole was the symbol, or whether it was the designation of the pole itself. It certainly does occasionally appear as the name of a deity, and we also hear of priests of *Asherah*; but this is only seldom, and it may be simply a mistake on the part of the historians, for they often confuse different religious usages and the names of distinct deities. We must leave the question undecided; but in no case must we identify this *Asherah* with *Astarte* or *Ashtoreth*, the goddess of the Sidonians, who was worshipped at *Askelon* as well as *Sidon*; for *Astarte* was a virgin goddess who required from her devotees unnatural abstinence, fasts, and self-inflicted torture; whereas the *asherahs* were closely connected with licentious practices.¹ We must also bear in mind that the fact of an *asherah* standing by an altar or sanctuary of *Yahweh* is no proof in itself that any other deity was worshipped there, for this symbol may have been used in the worship of *Yahweh* himself, as we know to have been the case with the images of the bull, the *massabahs* (anointed stones), the *chamnanim* (images of the sun), and the *bamahs* (heights). Rightly to comprehend the religious practices of the Israelites, we must constantly bear in mind that their worship of *Yahweh* was a strange compound of the teaching

¹ Compare Vol. II., p. 100.

of Moses with the ancient usages of the Semitic tribes common to the worship of Baal, Chemosh, Dagon, or Astarte, as well as Yahweh. Just as Solomon had erected Jachin and Boaz in front of Yahweh's temple at Jerusalem, so Ahab reared an *asherah* before Baal's sanctuary at Samaria.

We must not suppose, however, that Ahab intended to abolish the worship of Yahweh. So far is this from being the case that we shall presently see him surrounded by the prophets of Israel's god; while the names of three of his children, the only ones we know, are compounded with the name of Yahweh, which appears at the beginning of *Jehoram*, and at the end of both *Ahaziah* and *Athaliah*. Ahab then had no intention of substituting Baal for Yahweh; though this might have been the ultimate result of the indulgence he extended to his worshippers.

While Ahab was thus undermining the national religion of Israel by the freedom of his worship, he gave proof of his courage and generosity in the war against Syria.

Benhadad II. had brought Israel to the brink of ruin. He had already laid siege to Samaria, and, if it fell, he would reduce Ahab to the position of the two-and-thirty princes who followed him as vassals to the field. There seemed small chance of escaping this fate, and Ahab was willing to make peace upon very humiliating terms. He offered not only to pay a large sum of money, but even to suffer the most beautiful of his wives to be removed to Benhadad's harem, and his own sons to be taken as hostages. But even this would not satisfy the Syrian prince, who insisted on sending some of his courtiers to strip the palaces of Ahab and his chief nobles of everything they thought worth taking. This was too much! Benhadad was evidently bent on compassing the utter ruin of his opponent; and, after due consultation, Ahab rejected the cruel terms. Then Benhadad sent him

another vaunting message, "May the gods undo me, if I grind not Samaria till my followers can hardly fill their hands with the dust!" but despair and anger gave Ahab courage, and he answered with equal point and dignity, "Let not him, who is girding on his armour, boast as though he were taking it off!"

When Benhadad received the answer he happened to be feasting in his tent with his two-and-thirty vassals. Hot as he was with wine, he cried at once, "Bring up the storming rams!" and was immediately obeyed. With a deafening war cry, and a storm of arrows, the Syrians hurled the battering rams against wall and gate of Samaria. Huge masses of stone fell crashing upon the walls and rolled into the fortress, while all Samaria trembled. But behold! a prophet has accosted Ahab with the words of cheer, "Do you see this mighty army? Thus says Yahweh: I will give it over this very day into your hand, that you may know my might!" "By whose hand will he do it?" asked Ahab. "By the pages of the provincial governors!" was the strange reply. "And who must lead them?" said Ahab again, "You yourself!" answered the prophet. The valiant prince was ready, for he had absolute faith in Yahweh's promise. He hurriedly ran over the attendants, grooms, and pages of the nobles—a strange army, truly!—and found that there were two hundred and thirty-two in all. They were soon in readiness to lead the van; and all the other men of military age, to the number of seven thousand, followed after them. Now, throw wide the gates and charge! Benhadad is still carousing when news is brought him that a band of Israelites is issuing from the city. "Whatever they are coming for," cries the drunken chief, "to fight or to surrender, seize them alive." But he was soon to repent his overweening pride. The new-made soldiers, so suddenly transformed from grooms, struck home, and the Syrians turned

in panic flight. Benhadad himself barely escaped in a chariot; but all his horses and war-chariots fell into Ahab's hands.

Benhadad was not driven to despair by this defeat. On the contrary, he sought the means of revenge. He attributed his reverse to two causes. In the first place the gods of Israel were evidently mountain gods, and in the second place his army was not sufficiently united. To secure better luck in future he must offer battle on a plain; but he must first supersede those vassal kings who still retained a certain amount of liberty, by governors removable at will, and wholly dependent upon himself.—The belief that the gods of Israel had more power on the mountains than in the valleys was the natural result of the difficulty which the Israelites had experienced ever since the conquest in subduing the inhabitants of the valleys.

Having thus weighed his chances and made all necessary arrangements, Benhadad took the field again the following spring, with an army as strong as ever. Ahab, too, had prepared for the conflict; for immediately after his victory the prophet who had instigated him to make the sally urged him to renew the contest on a more extensive scale.

At Aphek, then, probably in the plain of Jezreel, the two armies encamped over against each other. But, alas! how poor were the chances of Israel. Ahab's troops looked like two little flocks of goats in the face of the countless hosts of the Syrians! But once again a man of God spoke words of cheer. "O king!" he cried, "thus says Yahweh: Because the Syrians dared to call me a god of mountains only and not a god of valleys also, I will give this mighty host into your hand, that you may know that I am Yahweh."

Seven whole days the armies lay encamped against each other, without ever joining battle; and when at last they met, the Syrians were so utterly routed that they lost a

hundred thousand infantry on a single day! The survivors fled to Aphek; but when the city walls were broken in, twenty-seven thousand more were slain. Benhadad himself fled from one chamber to another, and when all hope of escape was lost, his attendants advised him to throw himself upon Ahab's mercy. The princes of Israel, they said, were famed for their clemency, and perhaps if they went as suppliants to Ahab, with sackcloth on their bodies and ropes round their necks, he might spare Benhadad's life. This plan, accordingly, was adopted, and was crowned with the wished-for success; for when Ahab heard the humble prayer: "Your servant Benhadad entreats his life!" he exclaimed; "Is he still living, then? He is my brother!" Benhadad's servants eagerly caught his gracious words, and repeated—"Remember what you have said: Benhadad is your brother!" Then Ahab ordered the king to be brought into his presence, received him graciously, and gave him a seat by his own side in his chariot. Now it was Benhadad's turn to pay the price of peace. He offered to return the cities which his father had conquered from Omri, and to assign a certain quarter of Damascus to the Israelite merchants, while Ahab, on his side, was to restore him to liberty and recognise him as his ally.¹ Ahab agreed to the terms, entered into the alliance, and released his captive.

But this act of leniency drew upon the king's head so sharp a prophetic rebuke that for the moment it embittered all the joy of victory. A member of one of the prophetic schools had a revelation from Yahweh that very day, and consequently went to one of his friends with the abrupt request, "Beat me!" The other refused to comply with the strange demand, upon which the prophet exclaimed in anger, "Since you will not obey Yahweh's word a lion shall come and slay you." It need hardly be added that the threat was

¹ After an amended version.

at once fulfilled, and that the man became the victim of his own contumacy. Meanwhile the prophet went to another man who, luckily for himself, was more accommodating, and beat him severely. Disfigured and bleeding, with his head bound up in a bandage,¹ as one who had been wounded in battle, the prophet waited for the king, and as soon as he drove by, implored his help. When permitted to state his case he said, "I had withdrawn from the turmoil of the battle when a man came to me with a Syrian captive. He gave him into my keeping and threatened that if I let him escape he would sell me myself as a slave, unless I paid him a talent of silver. But alas! when I was just looking about me² the man slipped off. Protect me, then!" But the king at once told him he was wrong. "You have pronounced your own condemnation," he said, "and must bear the loss." On hearing the sentence the prophet tore the bandage from his brow, and Ahab recognised him instantly. "Thus says Yahweh," cried the messenger of God, "inasmuch as you have let the man go unhurt upon whom my curse rested, you shall perish in his place and your people in the place of his!" Then Ahab returned to Samaria, deeply disturbed by what had taken place.

This story, like many others, helps us to understand the light in which the prophets were regarded by the people, and the kind of submission they endeavoured to exact. The members of the prophetic schools were inspired by Yahweh and received communications direct from him. They were bound to implicit obedience. Woe to him who evaded Yahweh's command! The prophet who suffered another to persuade him to break bread at Bethel, contrary to the divine command, had to pay for the trespass with his life. But again, the prophet's own commands must be obeyed by everyone without hesitation, for Yahweh would support the

¹ ² After an amended version.

honour of his interpreters with a mighty hand. Woe to him who resisted them! The hand that was raised against one of their number grew stark and stiff, and the man who refused to wound the prophet according to the word of Yahweh perished miserably. It was not for him to ask the meaning of the strange request. He had only to obey.

We must observe the cause of the prophet's wrath with Ahab. Benhadad had escaped. That was unbearable. Was not Yahweh a stern god who demanded bloody sacrifices? Had not Samuel done well to hew Agag in pieces? David's barbarous treatment of the conquered tribes was certainly far more in accordance with Yahweh's will, as conceived by the prophets, than the clemency of Ahab which savoured more of his freer conceptions and his worship of *asherahs*.¹

On another occasion, however, the king of Israel appears in a very unfavourable light.

In Jezreel, where he had laid out a house and grounds, there lived a certain Naboth, who refused to let him have his vineyard, however much he offered him for it. He would part with the piece of land that had so long descended from father to son in his family on no consideration. "Yahweh preserve me from it!" he cried, when the king proposed that he should barter or sell it. How monstrous it seems that his refusal should have thrown the king, in spite of all his wealth, into such dejection, that when he got home he flung himself upon his couch, with his face to the wall, and obstinately refused to come to table! How like a sulky child! Indeed, men of undisciplined character are often like great children, the mere sport of their own whims and passions. But there is danger toward, when one who gives the rein to his inclinations in this way happens to be king, especially if he has such a wife as Jezebel!

¹ Compare Vol. II., pp. 100, 101.

While Ahab was indulging his vexation, his wife came and asked him why he was so cast down, and why he refused to eat? He told her all about it, in great wrath, but she covered him with railery, and cried, "A fine king of Israel, indeed! Rise up and eat your fill, for I will get this vineyard for you!" Then she set about accomplishing her promise, and wrote a letter in the king's name, signed it with his seal, and sent it to the elders and chief inhabitants of Jezreel. In this letter she gave an account of what had happened, and how Naboth had dared to refuse the king his vineyard. She pointed out that this was nothing short of treason and rebellion against God's anointed,¹ and ordered the elders to treat it as such. They were to proclaim a fast-day to appease the offended deity, and were then to bring the charge against Naboth. They must take care to provide certain men who would set the affair in the proper light; and, in fact, must arrange the details as best they could, only taking care that the result should be Naboth's death.

Jezebel found the elders of Jezreel only too submissive, and ere long Naboth, with all his family²—for such was still the barbarous custom of the age—was stoned to death.

As soon as the evil deed was done news was sent to Jezebel, and directly she heard it she said to her husband, "Now go and take possession of the vineyard which Naboth would not give you, for the man is no more in the land of the living!" Now, though Ahab was not cruel and unjust enough to commit the murder himself, he was sufficiently unprincipled and covetous to eat the fruit which his daring and ambitious wife had plucked, so he set off at once for Jezreel, accompanied by his officers, Jehu, Bidcar,³ and others, to take possession of the murdered man's estate, which had, of course, been confiscated.

But he was not to be left in undisturbed enjoyment of his

¹ See p. 32.

² 2 Kings ix. 26.

³ 2 Kings ix. 25.

acquisition. Hard by Naboth's plot of land he met a man in the rough garment of a prophet, whom he and all his company knew well. It was Elijah, of Tishbeh in Gilead, the stormy and intrepid preacher of repentance. He stayed the royal chariot and cried out to the king, who was doubtless dismayed by the very sight of the man, "Here is a word of Yahweh for you! Do you think to murder and steal unpunished? On this very field shall the dogs lick up your blood—your very blood—and the city women shall bathe in it!" The king's heart sank within him, but he put on a show of defiance: "Do you dare to strike me thus in the face,¹ you enemy of me and mine!" he cried to the messenger of vengeance. "I do!" replied Elijah, "and I have struck home too! Since you have sold yourself to do evil, says Yahweh, I will bring evil upon you. I will pursue you till I have rooted out all that belongs to your house, down to the very slaves, till I have made it like the house of Jeroboam and the house of Baasha!" Ahab was always quickly moved, and this denunciation completely broke him. His joy in the possession of Naboth's vineyard was gone; he moved about sadly with naked feet,² and clothed in sackcloth, till Yahweh said to Elijah, "Do you see how Ahab humbles himself? I will not bring these curses upon his house during his lifetime, but in the reign of his son."

The writer who inserted this story in the book of Kings adds that Yahweh also foretold the mournful fate of Jezebel, and that she was the chief cause of Ahab's going so much further than his predecessors had done in his idolatrous practices.³ This threat against Jezebel may easily have been added to the story by some one who knew the result, and doubtless the older legend was itself to some extent coloured in the same way. This accounts, amongst other things, for its making Elijah say that destruction should not come upon

^{1 2 3} After an amended version.

Ahab's house till the time of his son. We can hardly suppose that Elijah really predicted this ; but, since it so fell out, the later writer, seeing that Ahab had been spared, attributed the fact to his great penitence. He forgot that a repentance which allowed him still to keep possession of the land he had stained by innocent blood, must have been barren and worthless in the eyes of God.

The following story tells us how Elijah's announcement of the punishment inflicted by Yahweh began to be fulfilled.

After three years' peace between Syria and Israel the war broke out again. Ahab longed to conquer Ramoth, in Gilead, which lay in Israel's territory, but was in the hands of the Syrians. He was the more disposed to undertake the expedition because he had entered into a close alliance with Jehoshaphat, king of Judah ; but when the two princes had assembled their united troops at Samaria and were ready to set out, Jehoshaphat proposed that they should first consult Yahweh. Ahab acquiesced, and summoned the prophets before him. They came before the thrones of the two monarchs to the number of four hundred, and Ahab asked : " Shall we go up against Ramoth ? Or shall we not ? " And they all shouted in reply : " Go up, for Yahweh will give the Syrians into your hands ! " Encouraging as this answer was, Jehoshaphat was not yet satisfied. " Is there no other prophet of Yahweh whom we can consult ? " he asked ; and Ahab answered, " Yes ! there is one more prophet here whom we could consult if we liked. It is Micaiah the son of Imlah. But I detest the man, for he never foretells success, but always failure to me ! " Jehoshaphat, however, persuaded him to send for Micaiah. The officer of the court who went to fetch him said to him on the way : " All the prophets are speaking after the king's heart. You, too, must give the same advice, and prophesy success ! " But Micaiah was deeply

conscious of his prophetic calling, and met the well-meant but seductive words of his companion with the earnest protest: "As sure as Yahweh lives, I will say nothing but what he commands me."

He was soon standing in the market place. If his god should lay a hard word upon his lips, it would demand no little courage for him to utter it! There sat Ahab and Jehoshaphat in their robes of state; and there were the four hundred prophets before them! What burning zeal inspired them! How certain they were of the result! One of them, a certain Zedekiah, had fixed a pair of iron horns upon his head, to give additional force to his words, and furnish a visible illustration of his cry, "Thus says Yahweh: Herewith shall you strike the Syrians until you shatter them!" At a sign from the king of Israel they checked their wild gesticulations, and were silent. Then Micaiah stood before the princes, and Ahab asked him, as he had asked the others, "Shall we go up against Ramoth or not?" At first he answered as the four hundred had done, "Go up, by all means! for Yahweh will give it into your hand." But there was a tone of mockery in his words, which forced the quick reply from Ahab, "I conjure you to utter nothing but the truth in Yahweh's name!" And thereupon Micaiah resumed, but with a sudden change of tone, "I see all Israel scattered upon the mountains, like sheep without a shepherd, and Yahweh says: they have lost their ruler, let them return in peace to their homes!" "There," said Ahab angrily, as he turned to Jehoshaphat, "You see how this man always prophesies disaster to me!" But hark, this one prediction is not all. The hand of Yahweh is upon Micaiah. "Listen to Yahweh's word," he cries. "I saw Yahweh upon his throne, with the host of heaven standing upon either side, and Yahweh said: 'Who can draw Ahab into a snare, and lead him up against Ramoth?' Then one angel said one

thing and another said another, but none of their words seemed good to Yahweh. At last the spirit of prophecy came forward and said that he could do it. He would go and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all the king's prophets. This plan pleased Yahweh well, and he said 'Go then! for you are sure to prosper.' And so," continued Micaiah, pointing to the four hundred prophets, who had doubtless given expression by cries and gestures of indignation to the feelings aroused by the fatal prophecy, "So Yahweh has sent a lying spirit into all these your prophets; and, though they promise you success with all their might, yet Yahweh foretells disaster to you!" Upon this Zedekiah, boiling with rage, sprang up to the prophet of evil, and, striking him in the face, cried scornfully, "Which way did Yahweh's spirit leave me to speak to you?" "You will know well enough," was the bitter answer, "when you fly from chamber to chamber to hide yourself!" Here Ahab put an end to the passionate altercation, which he must have thought in the highest degree inopportune, by commanding Micaiah to be thrown into prison, and kept upon the poorest prison fare, till he should come back safe and sound. Micaiah on his part retired with the cry, "If you ever come back safe, then Yahweh has not spoken by me. Mark it well, all you assembled tribes!"

What a strange affair this consultation of the deity must have been! If a man got the answer he wanted, so much the better. If not, he might yield to the oracle if of a timid disposition; but otherwise he went his way just as if he had never consulted it at all! If any disaster overtook him he accused himself of disobedience; but if he succeeded, then woe to the representative of Yahweh who had prophesied failure! We find it difficult to conceive how these prophets could really believe that their god revealed the future to them, but there is no room to doubt that they did; and here we

see one of the ways in which they explained their failures when the event falsified their predictions. Yahweh sometimes sent a lying spirit to a prophet, with the express purpose of destroying the man who consulted him.

On this occasion the two kings paid small attention to Micaiah's gloomy prophecy, though Ahab took one special precaution with the view of putting it to shame. He did not go to battle in his royal arms, but accoutred as a common soldier. Did he think to escape the lot that Yahweh had decreed? Fool! Though all things seemed to conspire with him to make his plan successful, yet was all in vain! The king of the Syrians had ordered the thirty-two commanders of his war chariots to fight with no one but the king of Israel. Him they must seek out and slay. Now when they saw Jehoshaphat they thought he was the king of Israel, and turned all their strength against him. Jehoshaphat was hard put to it, but when he raised his war cry, "For Yahweh and Jehoshaphat," his assailants saw their mistake and left him. But while these doughty warriors were seeking Ahab in vain, a certain Syrian drew his bow against the bands of Israel. He simply aimed his shaft where he thought that it would strike, without knowing against whom he bent his bow—and behold! he struck the king of Israel between the breastplate and the lower armour. Ahab felt that he was deeply wounded and said to his charioteer, "Drive me behind the lines of battle, for I am sore wounded!" But though he could no longer fight he would not needlessly discourage his men, so he still remained, standing in his chariot with his face turned towards the Syrians—hero that he was!—while his blood flowed down into the car beneath. At last when evening drew on he sank into the chariot, and was no more. The battle was indecisive, but the king's death dispersed the Israelites in all haste to their homes.

Ahab's body was carried to Samaria in the chariot and

buried there ; and, when his blood was washed from the car in the public pool, the dogs licked it up, and the city women bathed in it, just as Yahweh had foretold. Ahab had been king two-and-twenty years.

He was, doubtless, deeply lamented by many of his subjects. He had made peace with Judah and recognised its independence, perhaps following his father, or perhaps inaugurating a new policy thereby. He had repulsed and humbled the Syrians. Commerce, industry, arts and sciences had flourished under him ; and, if he had given Baal a temple in Samaria, the majority of the worshippers of Yahweh did not complain of it.

This is manifest from the scene with those four hundred prophets, whom it would be a great mistake to regard as deceivers. It is true that they no more received direct communications from Yahweh than you or I ; but neither did Micaiah, the son of Imlah, or any other human being. This does not give us the smallest right to doubt their good faith. The sight of the united armies of the monarchs dazzled them. Surely, the union of Israel and Judah gave good grounds for the hope that their common god would help them. Surely, Yahweh would be with them in his might. The unanimity of the four hundred prophets shows how much they were attached to their valiant and generous king, the patron of art, of knowledge, and of commerce. Such were, doubtless, the sentiments of the great majority. It is true that Naboth's death leaves a stain upon Ahab's life ; but there was hardly a king in ancient times who had not some such deeds upon his conscience. The unlimited power which they exercised led them but too easily astray. By one such crime, or even more than one, a king did not necessarily forfeit the respect and affection of his people, if he conferred upon them benefits that might weigh against them.

In any other country, then, Ahab would have been an

honoured prince; but in Israel he had to reckon with the vehement opposition of the followers of Moses. They were more indignant than the general public at Naboth's murder, and they could not endure the temple of Baal at Samaria. At their head stood Elijah, of Tishbeh; and they contributed not a little to the fall of the house of Omri.

CHAPTER XL.

THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF OMRI.

1 KINGS XXII. 51-53; 2 KINGS I, III., VIII. 7-15, 23b, 29, IX. 1-X. 28.

IMMEDIATELY after Ahab's death Mesha, the king of Moab, who had been tributary to Israel and had paid a hundred thousand unshorn sheep and a hundred thousand rams each year,¹ threw off the yoke.

As long as we had no authorities for the history of these times but the Israelite writers, we knew absolutely nothing of the doings of the Moabites between their subjection by David and their revolt after Ahab's death; but not long ago a most interesting monument of antiquity was discovered, which we must not pass over in silence.

In August, 1868, Professor Petermann, of Berlin, happened to be in Jerusalem, and was there informed by a certain Mr. Klein, a missionary in the employment of an English society, that a stone of basalt had been discovered on the site of the ancient city of Dibon, east of the Dead Sea, in the former territory of Moab. It was about three feet ten inches long, two feet broad, and fourteen and a half inches thick, and bore a distinctly legible inscription in three and thirty lines. When the Bedouins showed Mr. Klein this stone they told him that he was the first European who had ever known of its existence. Since

¹ 2 Kings iii. 4.

he had not the necessary means of taking an impression of the inscription with him, he had only copied a few letters, which the Professor, however, immediately recognised as old Phœnician. Petermann was convinced that the inscription must be of the deepest interest, and accordingly did his best to get possession of the stone, but without success. Meanwhile, the interpreter of the French consulate at Jerusalem, M. Ganneau, had heard of the discovery, and had sent an Arab to the spot to take an impression of the inscription. But since the Bedouins had now become aware of the great value attached to the stone by European scholars, they began to quarrel violently as to who should have the price that it might fetch, and M. Ganneau's Arab and his companions were exposed to danger of their lives in attempting to accomplish their task. They barely escaped with a few tattered fragments of wet paper, upon which a part of the inscription was stamped. Soon afterwards the Bedouins broke the stone, and the antiquarians had difficulty in rescuing even a portion of the fragments. With the various means at their disposal, however, they have attempted to recover the contents of the inscription and have succeeded in completing it, all but a few lines. The stone turns out to be a monument raised by this very king Mesha, who revolted after Ahab's death, and to belong to the period that intervened before King Jehoram endeavoured to make him tributary once more. The fact that the language and the form of the letters of this inscription closely resemble those of the Israelites and Phœnicians is in itself a matter of interest to us, for it shows how closely all these peoples were related to each other. But as students of Israel's religion we are far more interested in the contents than in the form of the inscription, for they teach us the ideas that Mesha entertained concerning his god Chemosh. To throw light upon this subject we give the following passages of the inscription :—

"I am Mesha, son of Chemoshnadab, king of Moab. My father ruled Moab thirty years and I succeeded him. I have raised this *bamah* for Chemosh, a *bamah* of deliverance, for he has delivered me from all my foes and has given me vengeance upon all that hate me. Omri, king of Israel, came up and oppressed Moab many years; for then was Chemosh angry with his land. Omri was succeeded by his son, and he too said: I will oppress Moab! But in my days Chemosh said: I will look upon him and upon his house, and Israel shall fall for ever. Now Omri had conquered the city of Madebah and taken possession of it. He and his son oppressed Moab forty years. But in my day Chemosh took pity on his people. I fortified Baal-meon with walls and moats, and then I laid siege to Kirjathaim wherein the Gadites had long dwelt, and which Israel's king had fortified. I fought against the city and took it, and put all the inhabitants to death in honour of Chemosh, the god of Moab And Chemosh said to me: Go forth and take the city of Nebo from Israel! Then I went out by night, fought against the place from dawn of day till noon, took it and slew all the inhabitants, for they were laid under the ban in honour of Astar-Chemosh. And I also took thence all the sacrificial instruments of Yahweh and consecrated them to Chemosh."

Then follow further statements as to the capture of cities, the erection of palaces and temples, measures to supply the capital with water, the fortification of certain places suitably situated for the purpose, and, in conclusion, a command from Chemosh to go up against Horonaim, a city of the Edomites, all which is matter of less interest to us. The whole tone of the passages we have given is precisely similar to that of many a narrative from the ancient history of Israel. Change the names and read David, for instance, instead of Mesha, Jerusalem instead of Dibon, Yahweh instead of Chemosh,

and Chemosh instead of Yahweh, and you will have a record that might very well have stood upon some Israelitish "stone of help."¹ Moab's humiliation is ascribed to the wrath of Chemosh, just as Israel looked for the cause of her defeats in the anger of Yahweh. Mesha wrote:—Chemosh said to me: Go forth! Just as Ahab might march upon Ramoth in obedience to Yahweh's command. Mesha laid the inhabitants of a conquered city under the ban in honour of Astar-Chemosh, just as David did in honour of Yahweh. In short, the spirit and the very style of expression are the same,

When this king Mesha erected his memorial on the *bamah* of Chemosh at Dibon, Ahab's son Azariah was king at Samaria. He trod in the footsteps of his father, both in fostering commerce by land and sea² and in worshipping the Tyrian Baal. We have only one narrative of any considerable extent that refers to him. It represents him as the worshipper of a foreign god and the enemy of Elijah, that sturdy champion of Yahweh's claims, and is so far in accordance with the facts; but in other respects it is purely legendary. Its contents are as follows:—

Ahaziah had fallen from a window in his palace at Samaria, and perceiving that his life was in danger, he sent messengers to the temple of Baalzebub, at Ekron, to ask the deity whether he was destined to recover from the effects of the accident or not.—We may remark in passing that this name of Baalzebub, which means "Lord of flies," was probably given to the deity because his help was specially invoked against the plague of flies which is often so serious in the East. The name Beelzebul, which the Jews afterwards gave to the prince of the devils,³ is certainly connected with the name of the Philistine deity, and the change of the

¹ Compare Vol. II., p. 269.

² 1 Kings xxii. 48, 49.

³ In Matthew xii. 24, and elsewhere, the true reading is Beelzebul, not Baalzebub.

last letter is either accidental or made with express reference to the possible meaning of "dung-god," which may be attached to the word in this form.

But to return to our story. Ahaziah believed that this Baalzebub could give him the most trustworthy prediction as to the issue of his sickness, and he therefore sent certain of his courtiers with rich presents to Ekron to consult his oracle there. But Yahweh commanded Elijah the Tishbite, by an angel, to go to meet them and tell them what folly it was to consult a foreign god, as if there were no god in Israel who could give them light and help. Elijah obeyed, and added, at Yahweh's command, that Ahaziah's bed of sickness should become his death-bed, to punish him for his contempt of Israel's god.

Ahaziah's messengers perceived that their encounter with Elijah had made it useless for them to continue their journey to Ekron. So they returned to Samaria and told the king all that had happened. They described the prophet who had uttered the fateful prediction as a man clad in a rough hide strapped round his body with a leathern girdle; and the king knew that it must have been Elijah. But so far from experiencing any sense of awe, so far from bowing down before the prophet's rebuke in shame for the sin he had committed, he sent an officer with fifty men to bring him into his presence.

Now Elijah was seated at the summit of a hill when the soldiers came to apprehend him, and the captain cried in a tone of rough command, "You man of God! In the king's name come down!" But the prophet answered in wrath, "If I am a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven to consume you and all your men!" And lo! the lightning flashed from heaven, and in a moment all the reckless ones who would have laid hands of violence upon the messenger of Yahweh, lay dead.

But Ahaziah did not yet repent, and sent another band as numerous as the first to seize Elijah. Their captain bore himself in the same overweening fashion, and thereby brought upon himself and his men the same dreadful fate as before. Ahaziah sent a third company, and the same fate would doubtless have overtaken them also had not their captain dealt far otherwise than his predecessors had done with the prophet. Approaching him with every token of respect, he threw himself upon his knees before him and cried beseechingly: "O man of God, spare my life and the life of my followers! Let us not perish like the other messengers of the king!" Then Yahweh's angel said to Elijah, "Go down with him, fear nothing!" So the man of God allowed the officer to conduct him into the presence of the king, to whom he repeated the prophecy which he had uttered to his messengers on their way to Ekron. He told him he should die, because he had acted as though there were no god in Israel. And accordingly Ahaziah died.

Nine centuries afterwards, when the disciples of one who was greater than Elijah endeavoured to persuade him by an appeal to the ancient man of God to punish those who had treated him with disrespect after the same fierce manner, he replied, "The son of man is not come to destroy men's lives but to save them;"¹ and whoever has anything of his spirit joins with him in rejecting Elijah's conduct as a model of his own. Our story illustrates the truth of the saying that as a man is so is his god; for Yahweh, who puts the lightning at his servant's command, becomes his accomplice, and sends the punishment not upon the chief offender, Ahaziah, but upon the instruments of his will. If we may judge by all the other stories about Elijah and the prophets who worked with him, this legend is a true embodiment of the spirit in which the zealots for the exclusive worship of Yahweh acted. Elijah's

¹ Luke ix. 51—56.

spirit is the spirit of zeal and courage, but also of cruelty and vengeance; and the Israelites might well deem it the spirit of that Yahweh who revealed himself as the consuming fire.

Ahaziah died childless, after a reign of only two years, and was followed by his brother Jehoram. The line of conduct pursued by this prince with reference to the state religion shows that the zeal against Baal displayed by the prophets of Yahweh had not been without its effect. Not that the worship of Baal was by any means banished from Israel, or that Jehoram entirely reversed the policy of his house; but he favoured the worship of Baal far less than his predecessors had done, and even removed the anointed stone which Ahab had erected in honour of Baal in front of his temple at Samaria. Doubtless this stone gave special offence to the supporters of Yahweh's exclusive worship.

It is not impossible that the king's attempt to propitiate the national god was the consequence of the unfavourable issue of his campaign against king Mesha. On this subject the following narrative is given us:¹

To reduce the revolted Moabites to subjection, Jehoram called in the help of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah. The allies determined to penetrate into Moab from the south, which would involve their passing through the territory of the Edomites; and since the king of Edom was Jehoshaphat's vassal, he too added his forces to the allied army. They met with every kind of obstruction on their way, and were delayed seven days, till at last a dearth of water came to complete their distress. Hereupon Jehoram cried in despair: "Alas! Yahweh has brought us all three into the field to give us up, without a blow, into the hands of the Moabites." Jehoshaphat answered his lamentation by asking whether there was not a prophet in the camp by whom they might consult Yah-

¹ 2 Kings iii.

weh. One of Jehoram's courtiers replied that Elisha the son of Shaphat, Elijah's constant follower, had accompanied the army. "He is a true prophet," exclaimed Jehoshaphat; and at once the three princes approached him with the prayer that he would pronounce an oracle. Elisha did not receive the visit very graciously. He was no friend to this son of Ahab, this servant of Baal! "What have I to do with you?" he said to him. "Go rather to your father's and your mother's prophets!" The king of Israel redoubled his entreaties: "Nay, but it would be too fearful, should Yahweh give over these three princes into the hands of the Moabites. Help us!" Elisha was persuaded by this reference to Jehoram's allies to consult his god, and cried: "By Yahweh of hosts, whose servant I am, were it not for the sake of Jehoshaphat I would not heed you! But since he is here, bring me a harper!" His order was obeyed, and when the musician stood before Elisha and touched the strings, the hand of Yahweh was laid on the prophet and he burst forth—"Thus says Yahweh: Fill the valley with trenches; for though you will perceive neither wind nor rain, yet the valley shall be filled with water, and man and beast shall drink. And this is the least part of what Yahweh will do for you. He will give the Moabites into your power, and you shall take all their strongholds and all their open cities, and shall cut down all their fruit trees, and shall stop up all their wells, and shall spoil all their fruitful fields with stones."

On the very next morning the water streamed into the valley from the direction of Edom. Thus the Israelites and their allies were saved from destruction; and, moreover, the Moabites were led into a snare; for they had advanced to the boundary of their land to meet the foe, and now they saw the water, upon which the rising sun behind them threw a ruddy glow that made it red as blood; so they thought the allies must have quarrelled and fallen one upon the other, and they

advanced in careless haste to the camp to seize the booty. In this condition they were easily routed, and when once the army was dispersed the whole country lay exposed to the invaders, and they were enabled to take possession of all the cities. But the capital, into which King Mesha and a part of his troops had thrown themselves, still offered a valiant resistance. Fearful devastations were committed by the conquerors everywhere. Men, women, and children were slain, the cities burned, the fruit trees felled; the wells stopped up, and the fields covered with stones. But the capital stood the siege bravely. Many of the garrison fell beneath the stones which were showered from the slings of the assailants, but the city still held out. Gradually Mesha was too hard put to it. He saw that unless some vigorous measure were taken, the place must inevitably fall into the hands of his exasperated foes. In vain did he lead seven hundred heavy armed troops in a sally against the position held by the Edomites. Perhaps he imagined that Judah's vassals would take his side, or at least allow him to escape; but he was disappointed, and the sally failed. At his wit's end, he had recourse to a desperate and fearful step. He was determined, cost what it might, to compel his god, Chemosh, to come in might and aid him. So he took his eldest son, the heir to the throne, and sacrificed him on the city walls! This deed produced the desired effect. Disaster after disaster fell upon the camp of Israel, and the allies were compelled to retire without accomplishing their purpose.

At first sight it seems difficult to understand how an Israelite historian could suppose the sacrifice of the Moabite king to have been the cause of disaster to the besiegers; and accordingly the commentators have invented all kinds of other explanations of his words, which are, "So there was a very great wrath against Israel." This expression cannot really mean anything but that the wrath of some deity

burned against Israel. We cannot tell exactly what the writer supposed the connection of events to be. Did he really think that on this occasion Yahweh was worsted by Chemosh, whose zeal to succour his people had been roused by so precious an offering? At any rate, we need not be surprised at the power he ascribes to the sacrifice offered by the Moabite king, when we reflect that he no more doubted the existence of Chemosh than he did that of Yahweh. When Israel was victorious in battle it was ascribed to the mighty help of Yahweh, who fought against the foes of those he loved, seizing his shield and buckler and rising up to help his people, brandishing his spear and blocking the way against his foes.¹ But from this it followed that when Israel was defeated Yahweh must have been far away,² or deaf,³ or asleep,⁴ or angry with his people; and so they implored him to make haste, to rouse himself, not to keep silence, but to rush to their aid. We are naturally disposed to accept all these expressions in a figurative sense, and they do indeed frequently occur in the mouths of authors, especially poets, whose conception of the nature of their god is far too exalted to be really consistent with such modes of expression; but of course there must once have been a time when they were used literally, for otherwise they could never have become current as metaphors.

Quite consistent with this childlike conception of Yahweh's nature is the idea which clearly shines through our story, that the prophet Elisha could not only foretell the future but could also bring about the deliverance of the army. The three princes bring their petition to him as to one who has power to help; and he himself speaks as though he held the fate of the allies in his hands. He will help them for

¹ Psalm xxxv. 1—3.

² Psalm xxii. 19, and elsewhere.

³ Psalm lxxxiii. 1, and elsewhere.

⁴ Psalm xxxv. 23, xlv. 23; lix. 5, and elsewhere.

Jehoshaphat's sake, but were he not with them he would not heed Jehoram. That is to say, his kindly feeling towards the king of Judah induced him to utter a favourable prediction and so to save the armies. We shall find other examples as we go on of this belief in the power of a prophet's word. When every allowance has been made for the involuntary confusion both of belief and feeling, which finds it so difficult to distinguish between the author and the herald of a misfortune, there is still abundant evidence that the Israelites, like other ancient peoples, believed that an unfavourable prediction actually caused an unfavourable event. The belief of antiquity in the foreknowledge of certain men was closely connected with a belief that they had power over the forces of nature and the fates of men, in virtue of the supernatural means they had at their disposal. Soothsaying is near akin to magic.¹

Jehoram, then, was unable to recover the revolted provinces, and moreover, at the close of his reign of twelve years' duration, war broke out again with the Syrians. In this war Jehoram was fairly successful. At any rate we find Ramoth in Gilead, which had been in the hands of the foe at the death of Ahab, once more in the hands of Israel at the end of Jehoram's reign. But just at this period Syria developed quite new powers under the rule of the terrible Hazael. The way in which this man became king is related as follows :²

Once on a time Elisha went to Damascus. Benhadad, the king, happened to be ill, and no sooner had he heard that the famous man of God from Israel was in his capital than he sent Hazael to him with a rich present of gold and forty camel loads of precious things, to consult Yahweh as to the issue of his sickness. Elisha answered Hazael thus : "Go

¹ Compare Vol. I., pp. 222, 223 ; Vol. II., p. 184.

² 2 Kings viii. 7-15.

and say to him, 'Your life shall be preserved!' but Yahweh has revealed to me that he will surely die." Amazed by such an answer, Hazael stood staring the prophet in the face, till the latter burst into tears; and when asked by his visitor why he wept, replied: "Because I know all the misery you will bring upon Israel—how you will burn down the fortresses with fire, slay the young men with the sword, dash the suckling children to pieces, and slaughter the women with child!" "Who am I," cried Hazael, "that I should do such mighty deeds? I! a mere dog!" "Yahweh has revealed to me," answered the prophet, "that you shall be king of Syria." Then Hazael returned to his prince and told him that Elisha promised he should recover; but the next day he took a napkin, soaked it in water, laid it over Benhadad's face, and so smothered him. Then he ascended the throne himself, and soon became a scourge to the Israelites, whose king he sent back wounded to Jezreel from a battle near Ramoth in Gilead.¹

Really, these Israelites were woefully deficient in love of truth! We have another proof of it in this story. Elisha is represented as urging Hazael to lie to his monarch and say that Yahweh had promised he should recover, and as telling him in Yahweh's name, that he should obtain the crown. Not a hint is dropped that Hazael had the least intention of murdering the king before this interview, and it is clearly implied that the change of the Syrian dynasty was effected entirely by Elisha. And all this is related in honour of the prophet and of Yahweh, who gave him his commission, and made use of Hazael as an instrument for chastising the sins of Israel!

We cannot tell whether this narrative has any historical foundation; whether, for instance, the Israelite prophets, and especially Elisha, in their zeal against Baal and the house of

¹ 2 Kings viii. 28, 29.

Omri, did really assist in raising Hazael to the throne ; or whether they hoped that war with the Syrians and heavy military disasters might work a wholesome change in the disposition of their people, and at the same time prove fatal to the detested royal house. If they did believe that Hazael's reign would be more favourable than Benhadad's to the worship of Yahweh, they would certainly have had no scruple in adopting any means they could devise for securing the change. But it is quite possible that the historian invented Elisha's visit to Damascus and his interview with Hazael as a form under which to express his conviction that Yahweh's power was not confined to the land of Canaan.

However this may be, it is certain that Elisha and those who felt with him cherished an intense hatred of the reigning family in Israel, that even the partial reformation effected by Jehoram when he put away Baal's *massebah* failed to reconcile them, and that nothing could satisfy them short of the entire extermination of the race of Ahab and Jezebel, as a penalty for their idolatry. Their ultimate success in exterminating Jehoram and his house is recorded in the following story.¹

Once on a time as certain Israelite generals and officers were sitting together in front of a house in Ramoth, they were startled by the sudden approach of a man whom the hide thrown over his naked body marked out as one of the "inspired." He was one of the "sons of the prophets," and had been sent to Ramoth by Elisha on a weighty mission. Casting his burning glance upon the officers he cried, "I bring you a word of God, O general!" "And which of us is it for?" asked one of them, half in derision. "It is for you," was the reply. The man thus singled out from his comrades was Jehu, the son of Jehoshaphat, generally called the son of Nimshi, after his grandfather. He was probably the commander-in-chief of the army. He went

¹ 2 Kings ix. 1 ff.

with the prophet into an inner chamber to hear what Yahweh had to say to him, and as soon as they were alone the man of God poured the oil of consecration over his head and cried: "Thus says Yahweh, the god of Israel: I anoint you king of Yahweh's people, king of Israel. Root out the race of Ahab your master, and avenge the death of my servants the prophets and all the worshippers of Yahweh whose blood Jezebel has poured out! Every male creature of the whole house of Ahab must be slain, rich and poor together, that it may be with them as with the house of Jeroboam and the house of Baasha. And Jezebel too shall be torn by the dogs and shall go unburied in Jezreel." Hardly had he ended his words when he burst from the chamber and vanished, as Elisha had expressly commanded.

When Jehu returned to his comrades he was assailed by a storm of questions. "Well! what is it all about? What had the fool to say to you?" Jehu shrugged his shoulders as if he thought nothing of it, and answered, "Oh! the kind of nonsense you'd expect from such a fellow!" But of course this did not satisfy the others. "No! but tell us what he said!" they cried; and at last Jehu, with a sudden change in his voice and manner, answered, "Well then! I will tell you what he said. He anointed me king of Israel in Yahweh's name!" No sooner had he uttered the words than the whole bearing and language of his companions underwent a sudden change. They accepted the words of this "fool" as the words of God, the signal for the execution of their project of raising Jehu to the throne. For they had doubtless been conspiring with him before this against Jehoram; and now Yahweh had spoken! They sprang to their feet, bowed down before Jehu, heaped up their mantles for him to stand upon, and cried amid the clang of trumpets, "Long live King Jehu!"

The new prince rapidly concerted his measures. He

ordered his followers to take good care that no one bore the news of what had been done at Ramoth to Jezreel, where, as we know, Jehoram lay wounded in bed. As soon as ever he could make the most necessary arrangements he himself set out for Jezreel.

Now Jehoram had but just received a visit from his ally the king of Judah, whose name was Ahaziah and whose mother was a daughter of Ahab's, when the guard on the royal watch-tower announced that a body of soldiers was approaching. Two horsemen whom the king sent, one after the other, to reconnoitre, were ordered by Jehu to join his company, and did not return. Meanwhile the scout on the watch-tower recognised the leader of the band as Jehu, by his reckless style of driving; and, on hearing this, Jehoram ordered his chariot to be yoked instantly and drove out, followed by Ahaziah, never dreaming of treachery, to meet his general and learn what cause had brought him from the camp. Just on the plot of land that had once belonged to Naboth they met each other, and Jehoram cried, "No ill news, Jehu? Is all well?" But terror sank into his soul when he heard the answer, "How should all be well while the idolatries and witcheries of your mother Jezebel fill the land?" He turned his chariot sharp round and cried aloud, "Treachery, Ahaziah!" but it was too late already. Jehu's shaft had struck him between the shoulders and pierced his body through. He fell down dead in his chariot. "Throw the body down here, upon this very field," said Jehu to Bidkar: "Do you remember how Elijah foretold all this to Ahab when we two rode behind the king?" Ahaziah, who had fled with all speed, was now pursued at Jehu's command. How could he let a grandson of Ahab escape? The king of Judah was overtaken and wounded before he found a refuge at Megiddo, where he died.

Jehu meanwhile had entered Jezreel, where Jezebel, the

queen-dowager, resided. As soon as she heard what had happened she knew that her days were numbered, for she, the Phœnician, had always been the great rock of offence to the enemies of Omri's house. But she was determined to retain her dignity and die like a princess. So she painted and decked herself as for some great occasion of state, and sat waiting for the approach of Jehu. No sooner did he enter the gate than she cried scornfully from the window of her palace, "Hail to thee, Zimri! murderer of thy lord!" Jehu saw her and shouted to her attendants, "Who is for me?" and then commanded the two or three chamberlains who signified their willingness to serve him to hurl her down below. They did so, and as Jezebel fell to the ground her blood bespattered the walls and Jehu's horses. The savage warrior drove right over her body and went to his meal! But when he had done he said, "Go and take this cursed woman and bury her. For be she what she may, she was at least a king's daughter!" So they went to take up the body, but nothing was left except the skull and some of the bones of the hands and feet. The dogs had devoured or dragged away the rest. And thus, as Jehu said when they brought him the news, Elijah's prophecy was fulfilled: "Jezebel's body shall be like dung upon the ground, and no one shall be able to say—This is Jezebel!"

All this was but the beginning of the massacre which Jehu executed or ordered. In Samaria there were seventy youthful members of the royal house, whose education was entrusted to special governors; but neither they nor the rulers of the city ventured to resist Jehu, and at his command they beheaded all these princes and sent their heads in baskets to Jezreel. Then Jehu had them all piled up in two heaps at the city gates, and went the next day and said to the people, whose curiosity was not unmixed with horror at the ghastly sight, "See now! I have risen against my

master and have slain him. And who has destroyed all these? Have I? Yes, but yet I am guiltless, for I have but accomplished all that Yahweh foretold concerning the house of Ahab. Yahweh has done what he proclaimed by the mouth of his servant Elijah."

Having thus attempted to justify himself, he went still further on the path he had entered, and slew not only every member of the royal house at Jezreel, but all the court officers, all the grandees, all the soothsayers and priests who were faithful to the old dynasty. Then on his way to Samaria he came to a spot called "the gathering place of the shepherds," where he met two and forty members of the royal house of Judah. They suspected no evil, and were on their way to the court at Jezreel to pay their respects to the queen mother and the princes. In contempt of all laws of hospitality Jehu slaughtered them also. Was not the whole court of Jerusalem polluted by kinship with Ahab?

A little further on he met Jonathan the son of Bechab. He was a Kenite,¹ but was a zealous worshipper of Yahweh, after Elijah's heart. It was he who commanded his fellow-tribesmen to abstain from wine and always to lead a wandering life, cultivating no fields, planting no vineyards, and possessing no fixed homes. Whether he had already issued these commands or only gave them afterwards, at any rate his sympathies lay in the same direction as those of the nazirites, and his spirit was akin to that of the zealous opponents of the worship of Baal.¹ When Jehu met this man, whom he evidently knew and respected, he cried: "Is your heart toward me as mine is toward you?" and on receiving a hearty affirmative, he asked him to take a place by his side in the chariot. "Come with me, then," he said, "and witness my zeal for Yahweh."

The zeal which Jonadab was to witness was frightful in

¹ Compare Vol. II., p. 280.

the extreme ; for, in the first place, every creature at Samaria that was ever so slightly connected with Ahab's house was murdered ; and, in the next place, the priests of Baal were all destroyed and the temple of the god himself laid waste. The following account of this last measure is given by the historian :—

Jehu summoned a great national gathering and said : “ Ahab served Baal but little in comparison with what I shall do ! Then let all the priests and prophets of Baal and all the servants of his temple come together for a great festival and sacrifice. Let no one fail ! ” When the feast day came, Jehu gave each of those who were to take part in the ceremony a festal robe from the royal wardrobes to distinguish them from all others, and having carefully ascertained that there was not a single worshipper of Yahweh amongst the throng of sacrificers, he ordered his body guard to rush into Baal's temple and put them every one to the sword. His orders were obeyed. First, everyone in the forecourt was slain. Then the sanctuary itself was stormed, and everyone in it slaughtered. The great image of Baal was burned, the *massebah* broken to pieces, and the whole temple razed to the ground. The place upon which it stood was made a dung-hill, and so remained for centuries. Thus did Jehu root out the worship of Baal from Israel.

This final assertion is evidently far too sweeping, for in the time of Jehu's son we find the *asherah* still standing at Samaria,¹ and in still later times the prophet Hosea speaks of the worship of Baal as a stain that cleaved to Israel even in his days. Nor is it easy to believe that Jehu entrapped the worshippers of Baal in the manner here set forth. The trick was far too obvious ; and at the very beginning of the revolt every Israelite must have known perfectly well that the worship of Baal was the very thing that most offended

¹ 2 Kings xiii. 6.

those who had raised Jehu to the throne. But the main fact that Jehu was 'zealous in the service of Yahweh, and was the great opponent of Baal, stands above all possibility of doubt.

Such, then, was the end of Omri's house, about 884 B.C. This dynasty had held the throne of Israel, not without honour, for half a century. In one respect its princes adopted a policy at variance alike with that of their predecessors and their successors. They not only kept constant peace with Judah, but even counted her kings amongst their allies. Moreover, they adopted Solomon's policy of encouraging commerce and adopting a thoroughly tolerant attitude with regard to religion. They were brave and enterprising princes, were not without success in war, and made the name of Israel feared by the surrounding peoples. Doubtless their subjects were in general well content with their rule; but there was one party bitterly opposed to them—the party of Yahweh's zealots with Elijah and Elisha at their head. They hated the house of Omri with an implacable hatred; and a century and a half later their successors still spoke of idolatrous practices as "the deeds of Omri and of Ahab."¹ The fall of this dynasty shows what a powerful influence an ecclesiastical party may exercise upon the fortunes of a state, for it was these zealots, and they alone, that put Jehu upon the throne. In doing so, however, they doubtless did good service to their people, for Jehu's triumph marked the victory of Yahweh over Baal.

The conflict between the two religions is depicted in the magnificent poetry of the narrative with which our next chapter deals.

¹ Michah vi. 16.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN YAHWEH AND BAAL.

1 KINGS XVII.—XIX.

ONCE on a time Elijah the Tishbite uttered these fearful words to Ahab : "As sure as Yahweh lives, the god of Israel whose servant I am, there shall no rain or dew fall within these coming years unless I bid it!"

Then Yahweh said to him, "Go eastwards and hide near the brook Cherith, on this side of Jordan. Fear not for your sustenance. With the water of the brook you can quench your thirst, and I have commanded the ravens to bring you food." Elijah obeyed, and behold! the ravens brought him meat and bread night and morning, and he drank the water of the brook. But when months had come and gone at last the brook dried up, for not a drop of rain had fallen to recruit its waters.

"Rise up," said Yahweh, "and go to sojourn in Zarephath, near Sidon. There dwells a widow to whom I have given the charge of sustaining you." The man of God obeyed the summons, and as he drew near the city gates he saw a widow gathering fire-wood. Almost dying of thirst, the prophet cried, "Ah! give me a draught of water from your cruise." The woman granted his request, but when he went on to beg a mouthful of bread she answered, "By Yahweh your god! I have nothing left but a handful of meal in the barrel and a few drops of oil in the cruise; and I have come out to gather a few sticks to make my last cake for myself and my little son. When that is gone we must starve!" The dull misery of her face, as she uttered these words, was lightened by a great joy when Elijah answered, "Fear nothing! do as you have said. But prepare a portion

of it for me first and then make ready the rest for yourself and your child. For thus says Yahweh, the god of Israel: The barrel of meal shall not be emptied nor the cruise of oil run dry till the rain falls!" And so it came to pass. Month after month they three lived upon that handful of meal and those few drops of oil.

But however great the blessing which Elijah brought the widow, the time soon came when she conceived an utter dread of him; for her boy grew ill and died. Surely that was because Elijah had come to live with her! For the presence of so holy a man might well bring Yahweh's wrath upon a sinful mortal whose unrighteousness was now forced upon his attention. So she cried out to the prophet, "What have I to do with you, O man of God! Why must you take up your abode with me and rob me of my child!" Elijah was touched by her grief, took the corpse from her bosom, went into the upper chamber in which he lived himself, laid the child upon the bed and then cried aloud to Yahweh, "O Yahweh, my god, art thou wrath with the widow in whose house I live, that thou hast slain her child?" Then he stretched himself three times upon the body and prayed, "Nay, Yahweh! let the child's breath come back!" His prayer was heard, the boy returned to life, and when he took him back to his mother she cried from the fulness of her joyful heart, "Now I know that you are a man of God indeed, and that your word is truth!"

It was now two years since Elijah had foretold the drought, and the third year was beginning when Yahweh commanded his servant to appear once more before Ahab, for rain was now about to fall. There was a fearful famine in Samaria, and when Elijah came to seek Ahab the latter had just been concerting measures to obtain fodder and water for his horses. In pursuance of this project he and Obadiah, the steward of the royal house, had set off by different routes to scour the

land and examine every place where wells or streams had once been known to exist. But it was all in vain.

Now this Obadiah was a zealous worshipper of Yahweh. He had once hidden a hundred prophets in two caves, fifty in each, when Jezebel was seeking the lives of all the prophets of Yahweh, and had fed them with bread and water. This man now met Elijah, and recognising the messenger of Yahweh at once, he fell upon the ground in reverence before him and exclaimed in amazement, "Are you here, my lord Elijah?" "Yes!" he replied shortly, "And do you go and tell your master that I am here!" But Obadiah shrank from doing so. "Ah, my lord," he urged, "what sin have I committed that you should expose me to Ahab's wrath? As sure as Yahweh lives, he has sent to all the surrounding lands to seek you, and when his messengers have said they could not find you he has made them confirm their tidings with an oath. And now you tell me to go and say to my king, 'Elijah is here!' and perhaps as soon as I am gone Yahweh's spirit will take you I know not where, and when Ahab finds that you are gone he will destroy me. Nor do I deserve such a fate, for I have feared Yahweh from my youth. Have you never heard how I defended a hundred prophets against the rage of Jezebel? Why should you cause my death?" But Elijah answered his appeal by the solemn assurance, "By Yahweh of hosts, whose servant I am, I will stand before Ahab's face this day!" Thus reassured, Obadiah went to find the king.

The words of Ahab's greeting to Elijah showed clearly enough what his feelings towards him were. "Are you here, you troubler of Israel's peace?" he cried. But Elijah did not yield to the king in acerbity. "I am no troubler of Israel's peace," he retorted, "It is you and your father's house who trouble Israel by forsaking the commands of Yahweh and worshipping the Baals! But come," he added, "it is time the matter were decided once for all. Call the

whole people of Israel together to Mount Carmel, and call Jezebel's four hundred prophets with them. Then we shall see whether Yahweh or Baal is God."

Ahab accepted the challenge, and a countless multitude streamed to Mount Carmel. Then Elijah, who stood with the prophets of Baal upon the summit, came forward and cried to the people, "How long will you halt between two beliefs? Make your choice between them! If Yahweh is God, then serve him; but if Baal, then worship him!" A dead silence followed his words. The people were evidently undecided, and intended to await the issue of the conflict. Elijah soon began it. "See!" he cried, "I am the only one of Yahweh's prophets left alive, and Baal's prophets are more than four hundred men. Now give us two oxen, and let them choose which they will; then let them slaughter it and lay it upon the wood upon their altar, but without setting fire to it. And I will do the same with the other. Then do you," he added, as he turned to the prophets of Baal, "call upon your god, and I will pray to Yahweh; and the god who answers by fire from heaven, he shall be God." A deafening shout proclaimed the people's approval of his words.

Elijah let the worshippers of Baal choose their ox, and invited them to begin the trial, since they were so numerous. They did as he proposed, and the victim soon lay upon the altar. Then a great cry rose from the priests, "O Baal, hear us!" But there was no sign that any deity had heard. From early morning to mid-day they raised their prayer, and ever from the whirling mass of dancers swaying round the altar the shout rose louder and more shrill. When this had lasted till noon Elijah cried in mockery, "Shout louder; for, since he is a god, he cannot fail to hear you! But perhaps he is immersed in thought. Or perhaps he has gone away somewhere. Can he be on a journey? Or can he be

asleep? Ah! but he is sure to wake up again, if you only shout like men!" Have they obeyed his words of scorn? Their shouts grow louder than ever, their voices rise into a shriek, their gestures are yet wilder and their dances fiercer than before! At last, in the very frenzy of their ecstasy they dash their knives and lancets into their own and each other's flesh till the blood streams down their bodies. Their entreaties wax more passionate yet. Surely their overwrought systems must give way! Not yet! they are leaping in the sword-dance yet again; their voices blend into one piercing yell, and a great twisted mass of swaying, leaping, rolling, dancing human forms, with distorted features, and bodies and faces covered with blood and dust, whirls before the swimming eyes of the spectators! and so till the time for evening sacrifice. But no answer came from heaven.

And now a change comes over the scene. The priests of Baal drop at last exhausted and confounded to the ground. Elijah stands up and motions the people with his hand. It is his turn now. A deathlike stillness succeeds the wild confusion, and the multitude gaze with reverence upon the man of God, whose whole bearing and expression tell of his invincible confidence in the triumph of his cause. He advances and cries, "Draw near!" upon which the people throng closer round him. There are the discomfited servants of Baal sitting, lying, and standing about their altar, on which the sacrifice lies unconsumed. Here is Elijah on the spot where Yahweh's altar stands, all broken, rent, and overturned. He piles up twelve great stones, after the number of the tribes of Israel, and the assembled multitudes look on in strained expectation as he throws out a broad trench right round the stones, arranges the wood for his sacrifice, slaughters the ox and lays it on the pile. Then he ordered some young men, who had offered their services, to pour four buckets-full of water over the sacrifice, which they did a second and a third time, until

not only all the wood and the sacrifice were thoroughly drenched, but the water had even filled the trench. At least there was no fire hidden in the pile. And now the time of evening sacrifice had come, and behold! Elijah, the prophet, raised his hands with solemn earnestness to heaven and prayed, "O Yahweh, god of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel! let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel and that I am thy servant, and have done all this at thy command! Hear, Yahweh, hear me! Teach this people that thou art God, and hast designed this famine to turn their hearts to thee." See there! The lightning has flashed from heaven! The wood bursts into a flame, the sacrifice is consumed, the very water that stands in the trench is licked up by the flames, and the awe-struck multitude fall trembling to the ground with the cry, "Yahweh is God! Yahweh, indeed, is God!"

The conqueror took instant advantage of the favourable disposition of the people, and urged them to seize the prophets of Baal. "Let not one of them escape!" he said, and was obeyed. The prophets were dragged to the brook Kishon, and there they were all slain. Then Elijah said to Ahab, "Rise up, eat and drink, for I hear the rushing sound of coming rain."

Whilst the king, rejoicing in his words of promise, was ordering the preparations for a festival, Elijah went up the mountain to pray. The strain upon him was still great, for though he had heard the sound of heavy rain in the distance not a speck of cloud was yet to be seen. The heavens were like brass. Elijah bowed down with his head between his knees, and commanded his servant to go to the side of the mountain that looked towards the sea and tell him whether there was a cloud on the horizon yet. He returned, and said that there was nothing; but the prophet, not discouraged yet, sent him a second time. Again the same blank

answer mocked his hopes. Again, and yet again, the servant went upon the self-same errand, till at last, when he returned for the seventh time, he brought the news, "A little cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, is rising out of the sea." Little as this might seem, it filled Elijah's soul with joy; so great was his faith in Yahweh's promises. The little cloud was but a herald of the coming rain. "Go," he cried to his servant, "Go at the top of your speed to Ahab, and tell him to haste away lest the rain stay his journey!" Meanwhile the wind arose, and great clouds rolled up right across the heavens. The rain descended in torrents. Ahab drove hard to Jezreel; but Elijah was there before him, for his feet were strengthened by Yahweh, and far outstripped the speed of Ahab's horses.

When Ahab had returned to his country place, he told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had slain all the prophets of Baal. Enraged by what she heard, the queen took a deep oath that she would have his life. In mortal fear, Elijah fled to Beersheba, in Judah, and there he left his attendant behind him. Then he entered the wilderness alone and journeyed on a whole day; after which he sat down under a tree, wearied in body and soul, and longed for death. "Oh, Yahweh!" he cried in prayer, "it is enough! now let me die, for I deserve no better lot than my fathers!" Filled with such gloomy thoughts, he sank to sleep. But his god was ready to renew his spirit, and sent his angel to rouse him with the words: "Rise up and eat!" Gazing round him, as he waked, the prophet saw close at his head a baked cake of bread and a cruise of water. When he had eaten and drunk he fell asleep again. But the angel waked him a second time and said, "Rise up and eat! else the journey will be too hard for you." The food and drink which he now took, gave him strength to journey forty days and forty

nights, till he came at last to Horeb, the mount of God, where he took refuge in a cave.

Thus his life was rescued, and he was safe from the plots of Jezebel. But at night, as he was sleeping in the cave, he heard his god cry to him, "Elijah! what dost thou here?" "O Yahweh, god of hosts," he answered, "I have been very zealous in thy cause, for the sons of Israel have broken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, and slain thy prophets with the edge of the sword, so that I am the only one now left alive; and they seek my life also." Without letting it appear, as yet, whether he accepted the excuse or not, Yahweh commanded the prophet to place himself at the entrance of the cave. As soon as he obeyed, Elijah received a clear enough reply to his complaint, in a vision. For behold! as he stood in front of the cave, Yahweh passed by before him. First there arose a mighty wind, which broke the mountains in pieces and rent the rocks before the face of Yahweh; but Yahweh himself was not in the storm. After the storm came an earthquake, but Yahweh was not there; and after the earthquake a fire, but Yahweh was not there. After all these terrible convulsions there came at last the whispering of a sweet and cooling breeze,¹ and Yahweh was there! Full of reverence and awe, Elijah hid his face in his mantle and waited with bowed head to know what his god would say to him. And straightway Yahweh said, as in the night, "Elijah! what dost thou here?" Again the prophet gave the answer of despair, "I have been very zealous for Yahweh, the god of hosts; for the sons of Israel have broken thy covenant and destroyed thy altars, and slain thy prophets. See, Lord! I am the only one yet left alive, and they seek to slay me also." So spoke the man of God, the fugitive; but he soon perceived how ill his excuses satisfied his god, for Yahweh said, "Go straightway back! Go first

¹ After an amended version.

to Damascus to anoint Hazael king of Syria. Then anoint Jehu, son of Nimshi, king over Israel. And anoint Elisha, son of Shaphat, of Abel-meholah, to be your successor. And if any escape the sword of Hazael Jehu shall slay them, and if any escape the sword of Jehu Elisha shall slay them. But I shall¹ spare me seven thousand whose knees have not bent before Baal, and whose mouths have not kissed him."

Thus rebuked, Elijah turned back from Horeb.

On his way he came upon Elisha, a rich landowner, who had taken twelve pieces of land under the plough². When Elijah found him, he was just ploughing up the twelfth. His work would, therefore, soon be over, and he could then enjoy his life at ease. But behold! Elijah went right up to him, flung his prophet's mantle upon his shoulders, as a sign that he called him to be his follower, and without uttering a single word pursued his way. Elisha would have been very ready to join him, but the call was so utterly unexpected! He hurried after him and said, "Let me go and kiss my father and mother, and then I will follow you!" "Go where you will!" was the rough reply. "It seems to matter little what I do to you!" Elisha saw that he must obey at once, and was prepared to do so. He slaughtered his oxen, offered the due portions to Yahweh, broke up his plough, cooked the rest of the meat with the wood, and prepared a feast for the people with it. When he had broken with his former life by this symbolical act, he followed Elijah and became his servant.

This story of the dearth proclaimed beforehand, the food which the ravens brought Elijah, the miraculous vessels in which the meal and oil never grew less however much was taken from them, the return of the dead child to life, the battle of the gods on Carmel, with the ocular demonstration

^{1 2} After an amended version.

that Yahweh was the true god, the prophet's miraculous meal in the desert, which enabled him to walk right on for forty days and nights (in which time, by the way, he could have covered the ground between Beersheba and Horeb twelve times over) the audible and visible appearance of Yahweh and his detailed injunctions to the prophet—all this, as we need not stay to prove, is entirely unhistorical.

Nor must we suppose that it is a highly-embellished tradition, and set about ascertaining what it really was that took place on Mount Carmel or Mount Horeb. It is indeed quite possible that under Ahab's rule Canaan suffered from a heavy famine. The Jewish tradition makes it last three years and a half.¹ It is possible, also, that Elijah, or some other prophet, seized the opportunity of exhorting both prince and people. It is certain at any rate that Elijah, the Tishbite, is as much a historical personage as Ahab himself. But throughout Elijah's story we must look for no account of deeds that were actually done at some definite period and by certain special people, but rather for a poetical conception of the battle waged by the zealots of Yahweh against the worship of Baal. Ahab represents the whole dynasty of Omri; and Elijah represents the prophets of Yahweh. As regards Elijah, his representative character is shown by the commands which Yahweh gives him when a fugitive on Mount Horeb. He tells him to anoint Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha. Elijah himself, however, simply summons Elisha to be his successor; while it is Elisha who anoints Hazael; and a prophet, whose name is not given, who anoints Jehu. It is possible, however, that our story is but a fragment of an old legend that represented Elijah as himself anointing Hazael and Jehu. In that case the editor of the book of Kings, when he introduced it into his work, may have omitted the passages which most directly

¹ Luke iv. 25; James v. 17.

contradicted the accounts he intended to adopt of the beginning of Hazael's and Jehu's reigns.

Be this as it may, our story pictures the great contest between Yahweh and Baal, which really lasted half a century, in the concentrated form under which a later generation looked back upon it. Of the four princes of the house of Omri, under all of whom the worship of Baal enjoyed peculiar privileges, none but Ahab, with his wife Jezebel, survived in the people's memory. The spirit of his government is sketched with manifest exaggeration. The legend never tells us that he actually worshipped Yahweh as the god of Israel, though he treated the worship of Baal with great indulgence. It makes Jezebel, who can hardly have gone further than to persecute or destroy some few of the most troublesome of Yahweh's prophets, compass a massacre on so great a scale that only a few of them escaped with their bare lives, and Elijah might even suppose himself the only one left alive. The dancing, shrieking, and self-mutilations of the priests are doubtless founded upon fact, since elsewhere, too, the servants of the sun-god Baal were wont to lament the death of their god, or celebrate the festival of his resurrection in some such rude and boisterous fashion as is here described; but the writer is not the least aware of the meaning of these religious practices, and his picture of them, therefore, is a simple caricature. Again, he delights in making Elijah mock and even massacre the prophets of Baal, wholly forgetting that the obvious good faith which he himself attributes to them removes them from the rank of impostors, and should have saved them from so miserable a fate.

In the popular traditions of the Israelites the details of the conflict between the two religious parties were forgotten; the circumstances under which the worship of Baal was introduced into Israel, the motives which directed the conduct of Omri and his successors, the reasons why the worship of Baal

struck such deep root, the gradually increasing courage and influence of the prophets of Yahweh, before which even Jehoram had to yield to some extent,—all this was forgotten by posterity. A long period was compressed into the narrow limits of a single contest, in which the whole question was decided. The slaughter of the prophets of Baal, which was really accomplished by Jehu, was placed under Ahab and attributed to Elijah; the prophets who had fought by the Tishbite's side (such as Micaiah, the son of Imlah) were forgotten, while the glory of all their achievements fell to Elijah. In the person of this rugged and passionate man of God, with his strange deportment, as he appeared where least expected or vanished suddenly, with his usual intrepid faith in Yahweh's help occasionally dashed by fits of bitterness and despondency, posterity sketched the prophets of the olden time.

And the sketch is a true one. Remember the prophet who rebuked Ahab for the leniency with which he had treated Benhadad; remember Elijah's rebuke of the same monarch for murdering Naboth; remember Micaiah, the son of Imlah; or the rough mode in which Elijah summoned Elisha as a prophet; or the anointing of Jehu, and his zeal for Yahweh. We shall presently meet with yet further illustrations of the same type of character.

Elijah's vision on Mount Horeb is often misinterpreted. It has even been called the gospel of the Old Testament, because the story of the cool and gentle breeze in which Yahweh was, when he could not be found in storm or fire or earthquake, seemed to convey a rebuke of Elijah's cruel conduct in slaughtering the priests of Baal at the brook Kishon. But this was evidently not the writer's meaning, as we may see from the injunctions that immediately follow, "Anoint Jehu, Hazael, and Elisha, that their swords and lips may slay all the idolaters." The idea of reformation by

the strength of conviction and affection was essentially foreign to antiquity, which was not yet ripe for it. Jehu's cruelty was doubtless applauded not only by Jonadab, but by all the other zealots of Yahweh. The vision is simply intended to give the prophet courage to take up his work once more, since the evil times will give place at last to the supremacy of Yahweh.

After generations, rejoicing in the victory of Yahweh over Baal, which had preserved the most precious of Israel's treasures, ascribed the triumph to the might of Israel's god and the courage of his prophets; and with good reason in either case.

But in making Elijah the embodiment of the prophetic order, the writer went astray in one respect. For the story of the four hundred prophets who urged Ahab and Jehoshaphat to go up against Ramoth is in itself enough to show that all the "inspired" of Yahweh had not zeal or courage to dare the king himself as Elijah did. Noble men, who are ready to risk their lives for a great purpose, are always rare, and were rare even in the schools of the prophets. But a handful of genuine enthusiasts can do much towards ennobling a whole class, a whole society, a whole period of history. Most of the prophets were common-place men, but from their midst arose the greatest heroes of their time, the champions of the truth, who have conferred upon the name of prophet a lasting and well-earned glory.

But although posterity held these stout-hearted champions in grateful reverence, yet the chief glory of the victory was always given to Yahweh himself. He had triumphed by his own superior strength. This thought is presented in the strangest guise. Yahweh chastises the land by a famine; he shows that he is the true god by sending down lightning to consume his sacrifice, and sustains his servants by his miraculous power. Such things do not happen in reality.

But there is a truth embodied in these miraculous stories, as there is in that of the conflict between Moses and Aaron and the Egyptian sorcerers for instance; and that truth is that Israel's god was mightier than any other. This appeared by the issue of the conflict. Baal was driven out by Yahweh. This result proved that the worship of Yahweh had more life and elasticity than the other. In spite of the indulgence shown to the Baal-worship by the princes, the people could not be permanently induced to adopt it. At first they may have allowed themselves to be beguiled by the king's example, but they were soon roused by the mighty voice of the prophets and made their own will felt. Omri's house yielded to some extent, but too grudgingly as the zealots thought, and too late to wash out its sin; and so it fell.

The trail of blood which marks the progress of Yahweh's triumph, and the carnal weapons with which his champions fought his battle, must not blind us to the fact that at bottom his victory was a moral triumph. How did Yahweh expel Baal? By the influence of the prophets. And yet these men had as little control over the fire of heaven as their opponents had, nor did any supernatural power watch over their lives to preserve them. The "inspired" of Baal doubtless sought the cause of the national disasters in the anger of their god, just as Yahweh's messengers looked for it in the wrath of theirs. In all these respects the two parties stood upon the same footing; and the worshippers of Baal had the king upon their side. If Elijah and his followers won the victory, then, the result can only be due to their superiority to the priests of the Tyrian god. The best, the bravest, the most true-hearted sons of Israel were on Yahweh's side, and against Baal, and the people bowed before their moral force.

Thus regarded the contest is most instructive, and the picture of Elijah on Mount Horeb is full of consolation to all lovers of the truth. Sometimes they cry that all is lost!

and are ready to despair. But God answers : Never lose heart. Storms in which God is not, in which the power of darkness seems to sweep unbridled and unconquered o'er the earth, come before the whispering of the cooling breeze ; but the kingdom of peace and blessedness is ever drawing nigh. Let all who love God truly, work for its approach.

CHAPTER XIII.

ELISHA THE PROPHET.

2 KINGS X. 29—36, XIII., II.—VIII. 6.

FOR eight and twenty years Jehu reigned over Israel, and his family retained the throne to the fourth generation. The historian points this out as a reward conferred upon Jehu by Yahweh for his zeal in extirpating the worship of Baal. Like all his predecessors he allowed the golden bulls to remain in the sanctuaries, but this conduct was less offensive even to the most advanced of his contemporaries than it was to the Judæan historian of a later age, who reproached all the kings of Israel with not relinquishing “the sin of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat.” In Jehu’s days a time of suffering began in Israel, for the Syrians, under the dreaded Hazael, gradually conquered almost all the land beyond the Jordan. Under Jehu’s son and successor, Jehoahaz, who reigned for seventeen years, things went no better. He was so completely dependent upon Hazael that he was only allowed to keep such a standing army as that prince permitted, namely a troop of fifty horsemen, ten war-chariots, and ten thousand infantry. Under his reign the king of Syria succeeded in taking the city of Gath, which had formerly belonged to the Philistines, and even threatened Jerusalem.¹ His troops

¹ 2 Kings xii. 17, 18.

must, therefore, have been able to pass freely through the land of Israel. But the country recovered at last from its humiliation. Joash, the son and successor of Jehoahaz, defeated the Syrians three times, and his son Jeroboam not only completed the deliverance of Israel but even raised it to power, as we shall see in a subsequent chapter.

Elisha's chief activity falls under the reigns of the first three princes of the house of Jehu. This is not the impression we gain from a continuous reading of the first half of the second book of Kings, for there most of the stories of Elisha precede the account of Jehu's exaltation to the throne. But we have a perfect right to reverse this order, for the stories of Elisha, as well as those of Elijah and others, are drawn from a different source from that which supplied the accounts of the Kings. They were evidently written to glorify the ancient men of God, to instruct, admonish, and console the disciples of the prophetic schools, and in their collected form they made up what our ancestors might have called a "mirror for prophets." Now in these stories the princes are seldom mentioned by name. "The king of Israel" or "the king of Syria" is introduced without any indication which particular king is meant. Thus, in the long account of Micaiah the son of Imlah, Ahab is only once mentioned by name, and is everywhere else described simply as "the king of Israel." Now since the names of the kings are seldom mentioned in the stories about Elisha, we are left to make out from the contents themselves at what period we ought to place them. We know, however, that Elisha lived down to the reign of Joash, and we almost always find him on a friendly footing with the Israelite princes. This would have been impossible under Jehoram, whom he detested¹ and whose overthrow he compassed; but it is quite natural under Jehu and his sons. Moreover, the stories about him assume

¹ See 2 Kings iii. 14.

that Israel was in the power of Syria, which was not the case before Jehu ascended the throne.

Let us now draw together the stories of Elisha.

Summoned by Elijah to be his follower,¹ he doubtless accompanied this man of God in his wanderings for some considerable time, serving him as his attendant,² executing his commands, and receiving his instruction, till he came to be known as the great Tishbite's foremost disciple. How long this lasted we cannot tell. Were it not that Elijah plays a part in the legend of Ahaziah's death, we should have no hesitation in assuming that he died before Ahab; for we should gather as much from the scene in which the four hundred prophets promise victory to this prince and Micaiah alone utters a note of warning, while Elijah is never mentioned at all. Not that he would necessarily have been present, but we should have expected Ahab to mention him when Jehoshaphat asked him whether there were no other prophets of Yahweh. And again, the fact of the whole mass of Yahweh's interpreters taking the wrong line is best explained on the supposition that Elijah was already dead, and no one else had as yet inherited his influence; and since we cannot be sure whether or not there is any historical foundation for the story of Elijah's foretelling Ahaziah's death, we must leave this point unsettled; but, at any rate, it is certain that Elijah did not live far into the reign of Jehoram, for when this prince and his allies were waging war with Moab, and inquired after a prophet, Elisha was described to them as the former servant of Elijah. Doubtless, the help which Elisha gave on this occasion established his fame, so that he was henceforth recognised by the members of the prophetic schools as their "father," and gradually gained the powerful influence of which he availed himself to overthrow the house of Omri, and raise Jehu to the throne.

¹ See p. 189.

² 2 Kings iii. 11.

The legend, however, does not trouble itself about the successive steps by which influence is won and the position of a leader attained, and simply regards it as divinely ordained that Elisha should take up Elijah's task. We are therefore told, in the following story, how this took place, at a definite moment.

When Yahweh was about to catch up Elijah into heaven in a storm, the man of God left Gilgal, accompanied by Elisha. "Stay here," he said to his disciple, "for Yahweh has sent me to Bethel." But Elisha knew well that his master would be taken from him, and refused to comply with his request. "By Yahweh and by your own life," he answered, "I will not leave you." So they went on to Bethel together. There the sons of the prophets said to Elisha, "Do you know that Yahweh will take away your master from you this day?" "Alas!" he answered gloomily, "I know it but too well. Speak of it no more." Again Elijah tried to throw him off. "Stay here," he said, "for Yahweh has sent me to Jericho;" but his faithful servant clung to him, and they went together to the City of Palms. And here the same words passed between Elisha and the sons of the prophets as at Bethel; for here, too, it had been revealed to them that Elijah would be taken away. So Elisha could not suffer him to cross the Jordan alone, even though he said that Yahweh had commanded it. He would stay with him still. When they reached the bank of the river Elijah rolled up his mantle and, in the presence of fifty prophets, smote the waters with it, upon which the river instantly stood still, while the lower waters rolled away and allowed the two companions to cross over dry-shod. Hardly had they reached the other side when Elisha was rewarded for his fidelity. "What is your wish?" asked the Tishbite. "What would you have from me before I go?" "A double share of your spirit," said Elisha instantly. "That is no

small thing," was Elijah's reply, "but if you are present when I go, it shall be granted you ; not otherwise." As they went on conversing thus, behold ! a chariot of fire, yoked to fiery horses, shot between them. Elijah was caught up in a storm to heaven, and when Elisha saw it he cried out, "O my father ! my father ! the war-chariots and horsemen of Israel !" The Tishbite was gone ; and his disconsolate disciple was left, rending his cloak for grief ! Then he took up the mantle that Elijah had let fall, and retraced his steps to the bank of Jordan. There, on the further side, stood the fifty sons of the prophets, who had seen him cross the stream with his master. They saw him come back alone, but there was no room to question whether or not he had inherited Elijah's spirit, for hardly had he struck the water with the mantle he had caught up from the spot on which it fell from Elijah's shoulders, than in answer to his cry, "Where is Yahweh, the god of Elijah ?" the river stayed its course and let him pass dryshod. The prophets bowed in reverence before him, and recognised him as their chief.

But yet they could not quite believe that Elijah was really gone for ever. "Let us," they said to Elisha, "send fifty stalwart men to seek him. Who can tell if the spirit of Yahweh has set him down upon some mountain, or in some valley ?" In vain did Elisha dissuade them. He knew that the master was gone for ever ; but the others persisted, till at last he gave an unwilling consent. So the men went to seek Elijah, but could find no trace of him. "Did I not foretell the result ?" said his successor to the incredulous prophets.

Yes, he had foretold it ; for he, as Elijah's true successor, who had received a double portion of his spirit, like a first-born son, well knew it to be true. Henceforth blessed be they who honour Elisha, and woe to them who despise him ! The men of Jericho, for instance, came to him with the complaint, "See, lord ! the site of our city is fair, but the water is bad,

and gives us many diseases.”¹ Elisha told them to bring him a new dish, with a little salt in it, whereupon he went to the city well and commanded the water, in Yahweh’s name, to become wholesome. It was at once deprived of every hurtful property, and remained good ever afterwards.

But the little children found that Yahweh’s representative was not to be mocked with impunity, for, as he was on his way from Jericho to Bethel, they shouted, “Bald-head!” after him, upon which he turned round and cursed them in Yahweh’s name, and straightway two she-bears came out of the forest and tore forty-two of them to pieces.

Since Elisha had to deal with a friendly dynasty, and a people suffering under the oppression of their enemies, it was but natural that he should be far less severe than Elijah, who had opposed the idolatrous Ahab, and that he should set himself to consoling and encouraging rather than chastising his people. Accordingly, the deeds ascribed to him, if we except that hideous curse of the little children, are generally deeds of love, and we seldom hear hard words from him. But all the stories preserved about him deal in the marvellous, and moreover are so loosely strung together that it is impossible to weave a connected history either of the prophet or his people from them. Thus, at the close of this story of the children torn to pieces by the bears, we find the words, “Then he went to Mount Carmel, and then he returned to Samaria,” though we have never heard of his having been in Samaria before. Another story is closed by the statement that the Syrians came no more into the land; whereas the very next passage begins, “Then Benhadad, king of Syria, collected his army and came and besieged Samaria.”²

Let us now listen to some of the stories of Elisha’s miracles.

¹ After an amended version. ² 2 Kings vi. 23, 24.

Once on a time a certain woman, the widow of a prophet, appealed to Elisha in distress: "Ah, my lord!" said she, "my husband, who feared Yahweh greatly, as you know, is now dead; and a creditor is going to sell my two sons because I cannot pay him what I owe." "I will help you," said the prophet. "What have you left?" "Alas!" she answered sadly, "nothing but a cruise of oil!" "Then ask all your neighbours to lend you empty vessels, as many as they can spare," answered Elisha. After that go home with your sons, shut the door close, and pour all the vessels full of oil." Strange as the injunction sounded, the widow obeyed the man of God in perfect faith. Her sons kept bringing her buckets and all kinds of vessels, while she poured them full of oil, for the contents of her cruise were never exhausted. At last, when she said to her sons, "Bring me another cask!" they said they had no more, and then the oil ceased flowing. Upon this she went to the man of God rejoicing, but he was not at all surprised at what she told him, and simply said: "Now go and sell the oil, pay off your debt, and live, with your two sons, upon the surplus."

Elisha often travelled about, as Elijah had done, to look after the welfare of the people and visit the schools of the prophets. On these journeys he sometimes passed through Shunem, not far from Mount Gilboa. In this place there lived a certain woman of some distinction, whose hospitality Elisha usually shared. Wishing to be of still more service to the holy man of God, she proposed to her husband that they should fit up¹ a room especially for him, that whenever he came that way he might stay with them. A bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp soon made an upper chamber very habitable; and Elisha, who was much pleased by the hospitality he received, desired to give some token of his gratitude. Accordingly he sent his servant Gehazi to question his

¹ After an amended version.

hostess, and ask whether he could be of any service to her by saying a good word to the king for instance, or asking the general of the army not to press her too hard for war levies. They must do something for her, he said; she had been so kind to them! But the woman answered: "What can you do for me? I live in the midst of my own people and am quite content." So Gehazi had no success to report to his master, but nevertheless he had a suggestion of his own. "She has no son," he said, "and her husband is an old man now." Then Elisha told him to call the woman; and she came and stood reverently in the doorway before the man of God. How her heart must have leapt when Elisha said straight out: "In a year you will have a son at your breast!" She could not believe that she was really to have such a blessing, and cried out: "O man of God! you are surely mocking me!" But a year thence she really had a son.

Thus the child's very birth had shown that Elisha's word was a word of God; but a greater proof of his power was shortly to be given. The boy thrived well at first; but, afterwards, one day, when he had gone out to join his father, who was with the reapers, he complained of a pain in his head, was carried home to his mother, and died that same day upon her lap. The mother straightway laid the little body upon the prophet's bed, shut the door of his room, and begged her husband to let her have an attendant and an ass to ride on, for she must visit the man of God. He asked her what it was that took her to the prophet, when it was neither new moon nor sabbath; but she only pressed the more for his permission, and was soon seated on her ass. "Drive on the ass," she cried to her attendant, "drive on hard till I tell you to slacken." So she went with all speed till she came to Carmel, where the prophet was. No sooner did he see her coming than he sent Gehazi to ask after her welfare, and her husband's and her son's. "All well!" she

answered, and rode on. But when she came to the man of God, she flung herself down before him in speechless agony, and grasped his knees in supplication. Gehazi thought it highly unbecoming to take such liberties with the holy man. We often find that servants are more anxious than their masters about the observance of outward forms of respect, partly because they feel that the honour shown to their masters gives a dignity to their own position, and partly out of genuine respect for them. Elisha himself well knew how to make allowance for the woman's grief, and set Gehazi aside with the words, "Let her alone! Her heart is full of misery, though I know not why, for Yahweh has hidden it from me." At last the woman's grief found words, "My lord," she sobbed, "did I ever ask you for a son? Nay, I besought you not to mock me!" Then Elisha saw it all, and, turning to Gehazi, cried hastily, "Gird up your loins, take my staff, go to this woman's house, greet no one on the way, nor even stay to return another's greeting, but haste to lay my staff upon the child's face!" Still the mother cried, "All this suffices not. By Yahweh's life and by your life, I will not leave you." Thus pressed, Elisha consented to go with her himself. It was well that she had persevered, for Gehazi met them on their way with the doleful tidings that he had laid his master's staff upon the child's face in vain. He had not awakened. So as soon as Elisha reached the house, he shut himself up in his own room, where the little body lay upon the bed, and prayed to Yahweh. Then he stretched himself upon the child, laying his mouth to its mouth, his eyes to its eyes, and his hands to its hands, till it began to grow warm. Then he paced up and down in the house for a time, and then returned and lay upon the child again. At last it sneezed, again and again, seven times, and then opened its eyes. Upon this, Elisha told Gehazi to call the Shunammite woman, and, when she

came, he gave her back her son alive. Dumb with amazement and gratitude, she bowed herself to the ground, and carried away her child, now given her a second time.

This same Shunammite had afterwards still further cause for gratitude to Elisha.¹ After calling her son back to life, he prophesied that Yahweh would send a famine of seven years upon Israel, and advised her to spend the time in some foreign country. Accordingly she went to sojourn amongst the Philistines; but at the end of the seven years she returned to her own country, and, since her property had meanwhile been seized by someone else, she went to implore the king's assistance in regaining it. Now it happened that when she came into the royal presence the king was talking to Gehazi, whom he had asked to give him an account of all Elisha's miracles. At the very moment when Gehazi was telling him how his master had once brought a dead child back to life, he saw the woman drawing near, and of course exclaimed, "See! there is the very woman of whom I was speaking, and there is her son with her!" The king was naturally predisposed to take the woman's part, and no sooner had he heard her petition than he commissioned one of his officers to restore her to the possession of her house and land, and even to see that all the produce of her estate during the seven years of her absence was handed over to her.

It was probably in this same time of famine, according to the story in the book of Kings, that Elisha gave proof of his power of robbing poisonous plants of their deadly properties, as well as restoring the dead to life. A number of the sons of the prophets at Gilgal had boiled a great pot full of greens, with a quantity of wild cucumbers amongst them; but when the hungry men sat down to eat the pottage they recognised the poisonous plant by its bitter taste, and cried in consternation to Elisha, "Man of God! there is poison in the pot!"

¹ 2 Kings viii. 1-6.

But Elisha put a little meal to it, after which they laded it out and found it perfectly wholesome.

On another occasion Elisha miraculously fed a number of his companions. A man of Baal-shalisha, not far from Gilgal, had given him twenty barley cakes as the first fruits of his harvest, together with a bag of bruised wheat. He told his servant to set this provision before a hundred men, who were probably members of the prophetic community. "What is the use of setting such a slender meal before so many guests?" asked the servant; but Elisha answered calmly, "Do as I tell you, for such is Yahweh's will. There will be some left over." And so there was, though all had eaten their fill. It was just as Yahweh had said.

One of these sons of the prophets was helped out of a great difficulty by Elisha when they were all busy removing their home to the valley of the Jordan. Their present abode, they said, was too small for them, but there was room enough in the valley. There were so many of them that the labour of making a new home would be but light. If each of them cut one good plank the chief part of the work would be done. So Elisha consented to the plan, and even accompanied the prophets to the Jordan. Now as one of them was felling a tree the head of his axe flew off and fell into the water; and what made the matter worse was that the axe was not his own. He had borrowed it. No sooner was the place where the iron had sunk pointed out to Elisha than he threw a piece of wood upon it, and the iron immediately floated up to the surface.

This last story stands between two others intended to show that foreigners as well as Israelites experienced Elisha's miraculous powers. The first of the two relates the cure of Naaman.

Naaman was the general of the Syrian king, and enjoyed

the utmost power and distinction, for Yahweh had given victory to the Syrians by his hand. But his greatness brought small comfort to him, for he was a leper. At last he heard from a little Israelite slave girl of his wife's how there was a mighty prophet in Samaria who could heal him; so he went, with a great retinue and rich presents, to the capital of Israel to seek for help. When he reached Samaria, he went straight to the palace, for his monarch had given him a letter to present to the king of Israel, the purport of which was as follows: "The bearer of this letter is my servant Naaman, whom I command you to heal of his leprosy." We can imagine the dismay with which the king of Israel read the letter. He tore his clothes in despair and cried aloud: "Am I a god, to kill and to make alive, that he tells me to cure a man of leprosy? Mark well my words; it is but a pretext for attacking me!" But as soon as Elisha, the man of God, heard what had happened he sent this message to the king: "Why should you tear your clothes? Only let the sick man come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel indeed." Accordingly Naaman was soon standing at Elisha's door, with all his train, upon which Gehazi came out and brought the Syrian this message from his master: "Go and bathe seven times in the Jordan, and then you will be clean." These words put Naaman into a towering passion. "What is this man of God about?" he cried. "I thought he would at least have come out himself, and called solemnly upon the name of Yahweh, and then struck his hand upon the leprous spots and healed them! Is this the way he treats me? And as for bathing in the Jordan, what good will come of that? Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the streams of Israel together?" So saying, the offended noble turned away; but his servants said: "My father, if this prophet had bid you do some desperate feat, you would doubtless have accomplished

it. Why then should you refuse so easy a behest? You can but try." Naaman yielded to their sensible advice, and bathed in Jordan seven times, upon which he was completely restored. He returned in transports to his deliverer, and leaving his chariots and horses at the door, pressed in himself and cried: "Now I know that there is no god on earth except in Israel!" He was naturally anxious to reward Elisha with costly presents, but the prophet steadily refused; upon which Naaman made a request which was readily granted—namely, that he might take a few sacks of earth with him to make an altar to Yahweh when he reached his own home again. Yahweh, the god who dwelt in Canaan, could only be worshipped on his own soil; so the Syrian determined to make a little Canaan in the heart of his own country. But though he vowed never to bring a gift to any other god, he begged to be forgiven for accompanying his prince to the temple of the god Rimmon and bowing down there with him. Elisha simply answered: "Go in peace!"

So Naaman turned homewards deeply impressed with Yahweh's might, and the disinterestedness of his prophets. As to the latter point, however, Elisha's purpose was crossed by Gehazi. This man could not bear to think of his master's refusing to take anything from the wealthy Syrian. So he hurried after him, and, as soon as Naaman saw him, he sprang from his chariot, hastened to meet him, and cried, "Is all well?" "Yes," said the treacherous servant, "all is well; but my master has sent me after you to say that two sons of the prophets from the mountains of Ephraim have just come to visit him, and that he would be glad to have a talent of silver (say £400) and two suits of clothes for them." "Nay, let me beg you," said the grateful Syrian, "to take two talents." Gehazi refused at first; but finally consented, upon which Naaman sent a couple of servants with him to carry the treasure. When they came to the city, Gehazi

relieved the men of their burden, and hid it all himself in Elisha's house. Then he went back into his master's presence. "Where have you come from?" asked Elisha immediately. "Your servant has been nowhere!" was his shameless answer. As if Elisha did not know where he had been! "Do you think," said the prophet, "that I did not see how the man leapt from his chariot and ran to meet you? Was this a time for grasping at money? May the leprosy of Naaman be upon you and upon your family for ever!" Hardly had Elisha said the words when the snowy whiteness of leprosy spread its flakes over Gehazi's body.

Sometimes, again, the Syrians were put to shame and loss by Elisha's power.

In the wars between Syria and Israel Elisha's help was a great source of strength to the latter; for Yahweh revealed the secret plans of the enemy to him, and again and again he warned the king of Israel of ambuscades that had been laid against him. So all the Syrian plans were rendered futile; and the king was much dejected, and thought there must be traitors amongst his private advisers. But they said, "It is not we who betray our monarch; but Elisha the prophet who tells his king everything that is spoken here, though it be never so secret." The king determined to put an end to this by ridding himself of Elisha altogether; so he sent a great army, with war-chariots and cavalry, to Dothan, where Elisha was. The soldiers surrounded the city by night; and in the morning, when the prophet's servant went out, he saw the army, and cried in terror to his master, "Alas! my lord, what shall we do?" But Elisha answered quietly, "Fear not, for those on our side are stronger than those on theirs." Then he prayed, "O Yahweh, open his eyes that he may see!" Then Yahweh opened the servant's eyes, and he saw upon the mountain round about a host of fiery chariots and riders compassing Elisha. Thus reassured, he

followed his master, who went to meet the enemy; and prayed, "O Yahweh, strike these troops with blindness!" His prayer was heard, and thereupon he said to the men, "You have made a mistake! Follow me, and I will bring you to the man you seek." They gave themselves up to his guidance, and he led them right into the middle of Samaria and then prayed again, "O Yahweh, open their eyes!" upon which they discovered to their terror where they had been brought. The king of Israel was lost in amazement, and said to the man of God, "My father! shall I slay them?" "Not at all," he replied, "No more than you would massacre your prisoners of war. Rather give them meat and drink, and let them return to their master." So the king gave the Syrians a great feast, after which they returned to their own land. In consequence of this event their troops came into the land of Israel no more.

Some time afterwards—we have already called attention to the extraordinary contradiction between the beginning of this story and the end of the last—some time afterwards Benhadad, the son of Hazael,¹ king of Syria, laid siege to Samaria and brought it into dire extremities. He cut off the supply of provisions so completely that there was a fearful famine in the city. An ass's head was sold for eighty shekels (say £8) and a small quantity of dove's dung for five shekels. Once, as the king of Israel—whom the sequel shows to have been Jehoahaz—was going round the walls, a woman begged him to help her. "If Yahweh cannot help you," he replied bitterly, "how can I? not with meal or oil at any rate! But speak out," he added, good-naturedly, "and tell me what it is!" Then she told her ghastly tale, as follows: "This woman here persuaded me to kill my baby by promising to kill hers afterwards. So yesterday we ate my son, and now that it is her child's turn she has hidden it." The king's

¹ See 2 Kings, xiii. 3, 24.

heart sickened as he heard the words. He rent his upper robe, and all the people saw that he had a mourning garment under it, next to his skin. His rage and horror vented themselves upon Elisha. Why did he bring no help? "May God requite me," he exclaimed, "if I do not roll the son of Shaphat's head before his feet!"

The man of God, whose life he threatened, was sitting in his own house with the elders of the city, who had doubtless come to him for comfort and advice. A few moments before, he had sent a messenger to request the king's attendance, but before he had returned the prophet said to those about him, "See now! this murderer's son is sending a man to strike off my head. Shut the door upon him and keep him out, for his master is following close upon his heels." When we think of the massacres of which Jehu had been guilty, we cannot wonder that even a zealot of Yahweh should call him a "murderer."¹ While Elisha was yet speaking the messenger arrived, closely followed by the king himself. The latter burst into a volley of reproaches and lamentations as he related the occurrence upon the walls, and finally exclaimed, "See now, it is Yahweh himself who sends this misery upon us. Why should I trust him any more?" But Elisha answered solemnly, "Hearken to Yahweh's word! Thus says your god: To-morrow shall a quart of flour or two quarts of barley be sold for a shekel in the gate of Samaria!" This oracle revived the drooping hopes of many a heart, but there were some who could not believe it, and the noble on whose arm the king was leaning cried in mockery, "Why! if Yahweh made windows in heaven such a thing could never come to pass!" Upon which the prophet turned to him with the words of doom: "You shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat of it!"

Now, in the neighbourhood of Samaria there were four

¹ Compare Hosea i. 4.

lepers, cut off from all intercourse with the world, as was customary with the miserable sufferers from this infectious disease. Tortured by hunger, they were taking counsel this very evening as to the course they had best pursue. Should they force their way into the city? All was a prey to famine there. Should they stay where they were? To do so was certain death. They had nothing to lose by making a bold stroke, so they agreed to go to the Syrian camp, and try whether they could lay hold of anything to eat. As soon as it was night, they carried out their plan; but who shall describe their amazement when they found the outposts deserted! Yahweh had made the Syrians hear a noise as of the war-chariots and horsemen of a mighty host, and they had cried one to another, "Hark! there are the Hittites coming! The king of Israel has bought their help. And there are the Egyptians coming upon us!" So they all fled for their lives in panic-stricken haste, leaving everything behind them—arms, baggage, tents, horses, and chariots. So when the lepers reached the first tent they found not a soul there. They ate and drank their fill, laid hold of all the clothes and other valuables they found, hid them, and went on to the next tent. Here, again, they seized all the booty; but then they said, "This will never do, after all! We have the chance of bringing the good news to the city now; but if we go on enjoying ourselves and gathering plunder all night, we shall come off badly when the morning overtakes us! Let us go to the city gate, and tell them at the palace how we have found things here." No sooner said than done. The lepers drew near to the sentinel, and shouted out to him that they had just come from the Syrian camp, where they had not seen a living soul or heard a human voice, but had found the horses and asses tethered, and the tents deserted. They roused the king at once with the news; but he thought he was clever enough to see through it, and told his officers

that it was very likely a stratagem of the Syrians to entice the starving garrison beyond the gates, and then surprise the city. One of the captains proposed that a few men should be sent to reconnoitre. Even if they perished, they would meet a fate no worse than that of their brethren. The king approved of this, and accordingly some warriors were sent off in two chariots, and they followed the track of the flying Syrians, all strewn with arms and raiment, as far as the Jordan. Then they came back with the news to the king. Upon this the inhabitants of Samaria streamed through the gate to plunder the deserted camp, and the sudden abundance of provisions made them cheap, as Yahweh had foretold. But the captain, who had mocked Elisha's word, had been commanded by the king to keep order in the gate; and the rush of people coming for food was so great that he was trampled under their feet and perished. Thus Elisha's prophecy was fulfilled. He saw the abundance, but might not share it.

The origin of some of these legends is pretty obvious. Thus the story of Elisha at Dothan is nothing but a visible presentation of the truth which a poet of a later time¹ expressed in the words, "The angel of Yahweh encamps round about them that fear him and delivers them." Or again, leprosy may have been a hereditary disease that reappeared from time to time in the family of Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, and the narrator may have sought an explanation of the fact in some sin committed by the founder of the house, while the mercenary character of many of the prophets induced him to fix upon covetousness as the specific failing in question. The story would then serve as a warning to the sons of the prophets.

Our attention is especially attracted by the story of Elijah's ascension to heaven. According to the belief of the Israelites,

¹ Psalm xxxiv. 7.

all men, good or bad, descended to the world below, with the sole exception of Elijah and Enoch,¹ who escaped the common lot and were taken up to heaven, the abode of Yahweh and his angels. So the Greek poets also sung of favoured mortals who never died and went to the land of shadows, but were taken to the Elysian fields. It is obvious why the legend selected Elijah to enjoy this privilege; he was the representative of the faithful prophets, and the messengers of Yahweh exalted their order in his person. The story describes with singular felicity the attributes which made Elisha the successor of Elijah, and secured him a greater share of his master's spirit than fell to the lot of any of his other disciples. Elisha clung to him with intense fidelity, and was far more capable of seeing with the eye of the spirit than any of the other sons of the prophets. The story, however, is of rather late origin, and the title of honour, "chariots and horsemen of Israel," which the writer makes Elisha confer upon Elijah, was in reality first given to Elisha himself, and afterwards transferred to his master.

It is a great pity that in all these traditions the history is so overlaid with miracle that the true features of Elisha can no longer be traced. But we can still make out with more or less distinctness the circumstances under which he lived. The Syrians were in the land; Samaria was repeatedly besieged, though it never fell, and there was a famine of seven years. Such were the times of Elisha. What he was to the king and people we can only guess; but we are surely safe in saying that he was the comforter of Israel, and cheered the hearts of his countrymen when broken down by the oppression of the enemy and the continued dearth. He told the sufferers of Yahweh's might, said that he was wrath with his people because they had served Baal, but that now his favour was secured by the rooting out of idolatry, and he

¹ See Vol. I., p. 84.

would bless them soon. He taught them that Yahweh's might extended to foreign peoples too, and that he could strike the hostile camp with panic when he would. Such was Elisha, the revered head of the prophets and the comforter of the oppressed. From time to time the king or people, in the bitterness of sheer despair, might throw the blame of all their sufferings upon him, but their anger was soon changed to veneration when his promises were fulfilled and his prayers answered. Then he was honoured as the firmest prop of the throne, as Israel's greatest benefactor. And this position he held until his death.

It is only natural then that a wonder-loving posterity should have made him foretell the fates that awaited Israel even after his death. Such is the purpose of the following story.

When Elisha was lying on the bed of sickness which it was feared would prove his death-bed, King Joash came to see him, stood weeping by his bed and cried, "Alas ! my father, must you go from us ?—you, the chariots and horsemen of Israel !" The sick man raised himself to comfort his visitor, and said, "Take up your bow and arrows." The king did so, and Elisha commanded him to fit an arrow to the string and lay his hands upon it. Then he put his own hands upon the king's and blessed them, and told him to open the window towards the east and shoot an arrow through it. As the arrow whistled through the air the prophet cried, "It is Yahweh's arrow of deliverance. He promises deliverance from the hand of the Syrians. You shall utterly defeat them at Aphek !" Greatly comforted Joash came and stood again by the prophet's bed. Elisha raised himself once more. "Take your quiver full of arrows," he said, and then added, "strike the ground with them." The king struck the ground three times and then paused, upon which the man of God wrath, and cried, "You should have struck five or six

times, and then you would have completely overcome the Syrians. As it is, you will defeat them three times only." Soon after this the prophet died. But his miraculous power did not cease even with his life; for once on a time as certain men were carrying a body to its grave they were terrified by a band of marauding Moabites, and huddled the corpse into Elisha's tomb, but no sooner had it touched the prophet's bones than the man returned to life!

Just as children are attracted by anything that glitters, so people of the olden time were attracted by miraculous stories. They measured the worth of their departed heroes by the marvellous deeds and astonishing predictions which were ascribed to them; but their eye for moral greatness was dull, and they had little perception of the influence which a commanding personality may wield. Elisha, they thought, had delivered Israel by deluding and entrapping the Syrian armies by his prayers and soothsaying, or by revealing the secrets of the hostile kings. He had rescued and succoured the favourites of Yahweh by casting magic salt into a well, or meal into a pot of poisoned herbs, or by multiplying oil and bread. We, who reject all these stories, can find something else to admire in Elisha. For us the scene at his bedside contains a lesson of comfort and encouragement. Let us try to realise it.

A man with no material power is dying in the capital of Israel. He is not rich; he holds no office which gives him any immediate control over the actions of men; he has but one weapon, the power of his word. Yet Israel's king stands weeping at his bedside, weeping because this "inspired" messenger of Yahweh is to be taken from him. In him both king and people will lose a mighty support, for this man is a greater strength to Israel than chariots and horsemen are. Joash does well to mourn for him, for he has had courage to wake the people's conscience; the might of his personality

has sufficed to turn them in the true direction, and rouse their moral and religious life.

Such men as Elisha everywhere and always give a strength to their people above the strength of armies, for the true blessings of a nation are reared on the foundations of its moral force.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH IN THE FIRST CENTURY AFTER THE DISRUPTION.

1 KINGS XIV. 21—XV. 24, XXII. 41—50.¹

THE day of Israel's suffering was to be followed by unexampled prosperity; but, before we go on with the thread of the story, we must glance at the history of Judah during the first century and a half after the disruption of the kingdom. It is very uninteresting, however. Possibly the "Book of the Chronicles of Judah's Kings," to which we are constantly referred for further information,² may have contained very interesting details as to the royal deeds of the princes of Judah; but this book is lost, and therefore cannot help us. Our books of Kings deal almost exclusively with the kings of Israel, and, except when those of Judah come into connection with the northern kingdom, they tell us hardly anything about them, except their names and how long each of them reigned. It is true that the books of Chronicles, in their turn, deal exclusively with the kings of Judah, and only speak of those of Israel in connection with the history of Judah; but this avails us little, for the Chronicler generally drew his meagre narratives from the same sources as those used by the author of Kings, and

¹ 2 Chronicles xi.—xvii., xix., xx.

² 1 Kings xiv. 29, xv. 7, 23. xxii. 45; 2 Kings viii. 23, xii. 19.

eked them out chiefly by the help of his own imagination. We are, therefore, seldom at liberty to follow him. We will now give a short sketch of what we may regard as the genuine history of Judah during this first century.

The house of David retained undisturbed possession of the throne, and accordingly none of those massacres took place which usually accompanied a change of dynasty in ancient times. But, though the land was spared all civil strife, it had only too frequent experience of the miseries of war. As early as in the fifth year of his reign, Rehoboam was compelled to sacrifice the treasures of the temple and of his palace, and to substitute brazen shields for the golden ones of his father's life-guard, in order to satisfy the demands of Shishak, king of Egypt. Throughout the remaining twelve years of his reign he was constantly at war with Jeroboam; and so was his son, Abijah, during the three years he reigned. We have already seen¹ how Abijah's son Asa, who occupied the throne for forty-one years, called in the help of the Syrians against Baasha of Israel, who had fortified Ramah, as a means of keeping Judah in terror and subjection; and how he afterwards built fortifications himself with the stones and beams he had torn from Ramah's walls and turrets. Asa died of a disease in the feet, and his son Jehoshaphat became king in his place. This Jehoshaphat was Ahab's ally in war, and joined his son, Ahaziah, in building some great ships at Ezeongeber to trade with Ophir; but on the failure of the first expedition, and the wreck of the vessels, he declined to try a second venture, as Ahaziah wished. Jehoshaphat reigned five-and-twenty years, and was succeeded by his son Jehoram, who married Athaliah, a daughter of Ahab.

Let us pause at this point to review the religious condition of Judah during this period. Were we to accept the evidence of the Chronicles we should have to suppose that

¹ See p. 144.

there was a wide gulf between the religion of Judah and that of Israel. It is true that this book attributes the humiliation of Judah by Shishak to the prevalent neglect of Yahweh; but the people humbly confessed their guilt, we are told, at the exhortation of the prophet Shemaiah, and "there was good still left in Judah;"¹ so Yahweh did not destroy it. But this was not the case in Israel, nor could it be; for Yahweh had once for all concluded a "covenant of salt"² with David and his house to give them the kingdom for ever; and therefore when Jeroboam rose up against Rehoboam he was rebelling against God. Moreover, the actual gulf that divided the two kingdoms was wide. Israel worshipped golden bulls, and had priests that were not Levites! But Judah had Aaronites for her priests, and observed the whole Law of Yahweh. What could Israel do against Judah then?—According to the Chronicles King Abijah reminded Jeroboam and his troops of all these facts before they joined in battle. The Ephraimite king neglected his warnings, and attempted to surround his army; but it soon appeared how Yahweh fought for the Judæans, for no sooner did they raise their war cry, no sooner did the priests sound the trumpets, than Yahweh scattered Jeroboam's army in flight, and five hundred thousand of his soldiers perished. All this, we are told, together with Abijah's other deeds and words, was recorded in the book of the prophet Iddo.—After all that has been said of the religious condition of the people under David and Solomon on the one hand, and of the Chronicler's views of history on the other, we need not stay to prove that this account of the religion of the Judæans in Abijah's time is as far from the truth as the statement that five hundred thousand Ephraimites fell! If we are to form a just conception of the religion of Israel, we must beware above all things of

¹ After an amended version of 2 Chronicles xii. 12.

² Compare Leviticus ii. 13; Numbers xviii. 19.

transplanting to the ninth and tenth centuries B.C. the religious laws and the opinions concerning the house of David which really belong to the third, in which the books of Chronicles were written.

The truth is that there was no important difference between the religion of the North and that of the South. We must not attach too great importance to the fact that the temple at Jerusalem contained no image of Yahweh, whereas golden bulls were set up at Dan and Bethel. The inhabitants of Judah stood upon no higher level than those of Israel. The conception of Yahweh's being, and the methods adopted to appease him, were identical in the two kingdoms. Altars, *bamahs*, *asherahs*, *chammanim*, *teraphim*, and images were common to them both. In both of them, every city, every village, nay, every family and every member of a family, enjoyed the most perfect freedom to worship his own god or gods in the way that pleased him; in both of them abominable licentiousness was here and there perpetrated in honour of the deity; in both a motley polytheism prevailed, but in both the worship of Yahweh, as Israel's god, was maintained through everything. The unsatisfactory religious condition of Judah is admitted with perfect frankness by the book of Kings¹ in the very passages that deal with Rehoboam and Abijah, the latter of whom is so highly extolled by the Chronicler.

The book of Kings, however, speaks much more highly of Asa and Jehoshaphat than of their predecessors. Asa, we are told, opposed every kind of idolatry, and even degraded his mother, Maachah, from her position and influence as the queen-mother, because she had carved "something abominable," probably some licentious symbol, upon an *asherah*. Asa burned the *asherah* itself,² but did not remove the *bamahs*.³ Jehoshaphat trod in his father's footsteps.⁴ But, although

¹ 1 Kings xiv. 22-24, xv. 3.

² 1 Kings xv. 13.

³ v. 14.

⁴ 1 Kings xxii. 46.

these monarchs purged the worship of Yahweh in the temple of Jerusalem of more than one strongly Canaanitish element, they certainly did not institute a complete reform, and on the whole the religion of Judah continued to resemble that of the northern kingdom in its main features. Had it been otherwise, we should hardly be able to understand the friendship which united the sister kingdoms so closely throughout the rule of Omri's house in the North.

Indeed, this alliance seriously perplexes the author of Chronicles, who has also sundry other accusations to bring against Asa and Jehoshaphat, in spite of the praise he found awarded to them in the book of Kings. Asa, in particular, incurs his displeasure. Why did he call in the help of the Syrians against Baasha? He ought to have put his trust in Yahweh alone, especially as he had been favoured above any other monarch with the proofs of Yahweh's readiness to help. To understand this last allusion we must examine the account of Asa's reign given by the Chronicler. It differs considerably from that in the book of Kings, and runs as follows:—No sooner had Asa reformed the religion of Judah than Zerah, king of the Ethiopians, marched against him, with an army no less than a million strong! But Asa prayed to Yahweh, and the mighty host was so utterly dispersed and routed that it could never be rallied any more. After this victory, the king, at the instigation of Azariah the prophet, prosecuted his religious reforms with great vigour, and went on growing more and more prosperous. But alas! twenty years afterwards, when Baasha came up against him, his faith forsook him, and instead of simply trusting that Yahweh would help him against Israel's king he called in the assistance of the Syrians. For this offence he was sharply rebuked by the seer Hanani, who foretold that he would be involved in war all the rest of his life; whereas the first six-and-thirty years of his reign had been spent in profound peace—the war

with the Ethiopians apparently not being reckoned. But Asa, so far from repenting when thus admonished, threw the bold prophet into prison, and in some other instances likewise behaved oppressively towards his subjects. During the two last years of his life he suffered from a disease in his feet; but neither did this bring him to repentance, for he relied more upon the skill of his physicians than upon Yahweh's help.

Of Jehoshaphat the Chronieler has much to say in the way of praise. This king, he tells us, not only reformed public worship in the same sense as his father, but even commissioned some of his nobles, supported by certain priests and Levites, to teach Yahweh's law to the people. He was, consequently, very prosperous and rich. No doubt it was wrong of him to marry his son into the family of Ahab, and so the seer Jehu, son of Hanani, distinctly told him as he returned from the battle at Ramoth, in which Ahab lost his life; but the man of God felt bound to add that there was much good in him, since he had put away the *asherahs* and served Yahweh with all his heart. Thus encouraged, Jehoshaphat pushed his religious reformation vigorously forward throughout his country, and paid special attention to the administration of justice. To reward his zeal and piety Yahweh blessed him marvellously. News was once brought to him of an enormous army of Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites who were marching against him and had already reached Hazazon-Tamar, or Engedi. Upon this he turned to Yahweh and proclaimed a universal fast. The Judæans streamed from every side into Jerusalem. The king stood in one of the forecourts of the temple, in the midst of the panic-stricken multitude, and prayed fervently to Israel's god. Then suddenly a Levite, Jehazael by name, one of the descendants of Asaph, was filled with the spirit of Yahweh, and cried in the midst of the assembly, "Harken, ye men of Judah and Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat! Thus

says Yahweh : Fear not, for God can give the victory to whom he will! Advance to-morrow to the desert of Jernel. You will not need to fight, for you will see how Yahweh rescues his beloved." When Jehoshaphat heard this both he and all his subjects bowed down in prayer to Yahweh, after which the choirs of Levites, Kohathites and Korahites, raised a psalm of praise. The next morning the Judæans marched out to the desert of Tekoa, and as they passed by the king he exhorted them to be of good courage and to trust implicitly in Yahweh. Finally he ordered the temple-choir to head the army, which marched to the sound of the hymn, "Sing praises to Yahweh whose mercy endureth for ever!" Their faith in Yahweh was abundantly justified, for when the song of praise rose up to heaven their god hurled all their enemies to destruction. The Moabites and Ammonites joined together and fell upon the Edomites, and when they had destroyed them turned upon each other. When the Judæans came to the camp they found nothing but corpses there. Not one was left alive. For three whole days they gathered the spoil, and on the fourth they assembled in a valley, ever afterwards known as "the valley of thanksgiving," and praised Yahweh for his succour. After this they returned to the temple with music and singing. It need hardly be said that all the neighbouring peoples were struck with terror when they heard how Yahweh fought against Israel's foes.—After this glowing description of Jehoshaphat's success and piety, the Chronicler rather incongruously adds a piece of information he had derived from some earlier authority, namely, that Jehoshaphat trod in the footsteps of his father Asa and served Yahweh, but did not remove the *bamahs*, inasmuch as the people did not yet serve the god of their fathers steadfastly. Moreover, he joined Ahaziah, king of Israel, in building some ships to trade with Tarshish; but they were wrecked, and the pro-

phet Eliezer plainly declared to the king that his alliance with the godless Ahaziah was the cause of the disaster. We may note in passing that the Chronicler makes a mistake about the ships, which were of the kind known as "ships of Tarshish," but were in this instance intended to trade with Ophir.

Now, when we set aside all these incredible stories in the Chronicles about the first four kings of Judah, and clear our minds of the underlying conception of the religious condition of the kingdom during their reigns, we have very few indications left of the moral and religious fruits which this first century bore.

All that we can infer from the information given in the books of Kings is that as yet comparatively few had fully realised the great distinction between the religion of the Canaanites and the worship of Yahweh after the spirit of Moses. Under Rehoboam and Abijah, who trod close in the footsteps of Solomon, this kernel of the nation had but little influence; whereas Asa and Jehoshaphat placed themselves to some extent under its guidance, and opposed some at least of the prevalent heathen practices. But Jehoshaphat's close alliance with the house of Omri shows how far from complete both his reformation and his father's must have been.

CHAPTER XV.

BAAL DEFEATED IN JUDAH.

2 KINGS VIII. 16-29, XI., XII.¹

THE battle between Yahweh and Baal, which raged so fiercely in the northern kingdom, during the first century after the disruption, was fought in Judah also. This is only what we should have expected from the similarity of

¹ 2 Chronicles xxi.-xxiv.

the religious condition of the two kingdoms at this time. Indeed, it was rendered inevitable by the close alliance which united them, for the house of Omri was always on good terms with that of David, and Jehoshaphat had married his son to Ahab's daughter Athaliah. This Athaliah appears to have inherited the ambitious and enterprising character of her mother Jezebel, and to have gained a complete ascendancy first over her husband Jehoram and afterwards over their son. Jehoram's reign of eight years was far from prosperous, for the Edomites revolted, and though the king inflicted a severe defeat upon them, he could not make them tributary again. The Chronicler does not fail to trace the avenging hand of Yahweh in these events. He has more to tell us concerning this Jehoram, and appears to have gained some of his information, at any rate, from ancient sources. Jehoshaphat, he tells us, had left rich legacies, including fortified cities in the territory of Judah, to all his sons, while the crown descended to the eldest, Jehoram. But the latter had all his brothers, together with other Judæan princes, massacred. It is not improbable that Jehoram did this deed with the same object which afterwards moved his wife to imitate it, namely, to disarm the opponents of his policy. The Chronicler, however, goes on to say that the prophet Elijah rebuked him, in a letter, and declared that Yahweh would punish him by inflicting heavy losses on him in his family, and bringing him to a fearful end himself. This is certainly untrue, for the prophet was already dead. Then we are told that the Philistines inflicted severe defeats upon Jehoram, and even carried away his wives and all his sons except the youngest, Ahaziah.—But since this Ahaziah was two and twenty years old¹ when his father died at the age of forty,² he can hardly have had many elder brothers and sisters. Finally Yahweh smote Jehoram with an incurable disease of

¹ 2 Kings viii. 26 ; compare 2 Chronicles xxii. 2.

² 2 Kings viii. 17 ; 2 Chronicles xxi. 5.

the bowels, of which he died after suffering for two years. He was held in such contempt that the usual burial of a king was denied him, and his body was laid in the City of David, but not in the royal tomb.

A few months afterwards his son Ahaziah, who had gone to pay a visit to his kinsman Jehoram of Israel, fell by the hand of Jehu, upon which Athaliah seized the reins of government. She began by slaughtering Ahaziah's children (her own grandchildren) and the other princes of the blood. The spirit of her subsequent rule may well be guessed. The worshippers of Baal, when persecuted in the northern kingdom by Jehu, found a refuge in Judah, and the temple of Baal at Jerusalem was much frequented and was soon filled with costly offerings, though here, as in the North, Yahweh was still recognised as Israel's god, and his temple still regarded as the principal shrine of the capital. Thus things went on for six years.

One of Ahaziah's children, however, had escaped the massacre. His aunt Josheba, a daughter of Jehoram, had at first hidden him, with the assistance of his nurse, in the "bed chamber" of the palace, and afterwards the chief priest Jehoiada had secured a place of refuge for him in one of the buildings that surrounded Yahweh's temple. Here he remained until, in the seventh year of Athaliah's reign, Jehoiada saw his chance of hurling the usurping queen from the throne and placing the scion of David's house upon it. For this purpose he entered into a conspiracy with the captains of the royal body-guard, introduced them to an interview with the king, swore them to secrecy, and accurately instructed them in the part they were to play. When the necessary plans had all been laid the day was fixed for putting them into execution. It was a sabbath, the day on which one half of the guards were relieved of their duties at the palace, while the other half took their

place. The relieving guards were to beset the three gates of the palace and prevent anyone from going in, and the others were to go to the temple to protect the king. As soon as they had secured the passages from the great altar to the sanctuary, Jehoiada brought out Joash, placed him on the steps of the portico, presented him to the people, set the crown on his head, and anointed him. On this the guards clapped their hands and shouted, "Long live the king!" All who were present either joined the cry or held their peace in terror. The deafening shout and the ceaseless braying of the trumpets reached the palace, and Athaliah hurried to the temple. The moment she saw the youthful king surrounded by her own guards she understood the position of affairs, and hastened towards the palace rending her garments and shrieking "Treason! treason!" Jehoiada would not have the temple polluted by her blood, so he ordered the guards to let her pass, but some of the soldiers followed her and slew her by the stables of the palace. Then beasts were slaughtered, and the heads of the people walked between the severed halves, swearing fidelity to the youthful king, while solemn sacrifices were being offered; after which the priest sprinkled them with the blood, and took an oath from the representatives of the people and the commanders of the army that they would uphold the worship of Yahweh.

This oath is a proof of the religious character of the revolution, which is further evinced by the attack which the people immediately made upon the shrine of Baal. It probably stood close by the temple of Yahweh, in the forecourt; but wherever it was the people utterly destroyed it, broke the images and altars to pieces, and slew the chief priest Mattan. Having thus purified the house of Yahweh, Jehoiada took steps to secure it from further pollution, and then escorted the young king, with the body-guards and commanders of the army to the palace.

There are several points in this account of the accession of king Joash that are not quite clear; but in spite of some few difficulties the whole account, which is taken from the book of Kings, is very intelligible. This is more than we can say for the story in Chronicles, which it is almost impossible to understand. The cause is easily detected on comparing the two accounts. The story in the book of Kings must have deeply shocked the Chronicler. The revolution itself he thought highly praiseworthy, for it restored the house of David to honour, and devastated Baal's temple; but the way in which tradition reported it to have been carried out appeared simply horrible to him. It was quite natural and proper for the chief priest to take the lead; but that the body-guard, who were not Levites, perhaps not even Israelites, should have had the chief honour of the revolution, that they should have taken their stand by the altar, and at the command of a priest too! was something so inconceivable, or rather so utterly impossible, that the Chronicler was compelled to substitute Levites for these guardsmen, and to make Jehoiada summon all the people to Jerusalem (a strange way of securing secrecy!) and forbid any layman to approach the temple. No doubt, a priest living in the Chronicler's own time would have done as he makes Jehoiada do; but the narrative in the book of Kings shows us that in the time of Joash there was no such sharp distinction between the priests and the laity as to exclude the latter from the sanctuary.

Of the reign of Joash, which lasted forty years, we know but little. When we remember how very young he was when he came to the throne, we shall see that he must, as a matter of course, have allowed himself to be entirely guided at first by Jehoiada, to whom he owed his crown. The worship of Yahweh, therefore, flourished again, and indeed Joash did

some very special services to the temple at Jerusalem, which had fallen here and there into a ruinous condition. The Chronicler attributes this state of things to wanton injuries inflicted on the temple by Athaliah; but this is out of the question, for she, too, worshipped the god of Israel. Neither she nor Jehoram, however, would be likely to take much trouble to keep the temple in repair; and the history of the measures taken by Joash will show us how it came to pass that the injuries inflicted by the hand of time were not made good. During the early years of his reign, Joash followed what was evidently the ancient custom of leaving the repairs needed by the temple to be done by the priests. They were expected to meet the cost out of the fixed revenues of the temple, such as the proceeds of vows and sacrifices of atonement, and the incidental sources of income, such as the freewill offerings of people who came to offer sacrifices, or who required the good offices of the priests for any other purpose. It was not unnatural that the priests should have been expected to keep the temple in repair, but it appeared that they were more anxious to look after themselves than the sanctuary. They kept the money in their own hands, and the temple was left to gradual decay. At last, in the twenty-third year of his reign, Joash took decisive measures. At his command, Jehoiada put a box, with a hole in the lid, by the altar, and into this box the door-keepers put all the money that was brought into the temple, leaving the priests, when deprived of this source of income, nothing but the proceeds of the guilt and sin-offerings. When there was enough money in the box, the chief priest, together with an officer sent by the king, counted it out, and paid it over to the carpenters and masons who were engaged in restoring the temple. It deserves remark that these contractors were not required to give any account of the money handed over to them, for they dealt honestly. But even now

no gold or silver utensils could be bought, since all the available money was required for the building itself. Moreover, Joash greatly diminished the temple treasure by using it to buy off Hazael, who laid siege to Gath and threatened Jerusalem, after humbling the northern kingdom.

According to the Chronicles we must distinguish two periods in the life of Joash. That during which Jehoiada, who was married to his aunt Josheba, stood at his side, and that which elapsed after his death. As long as Jehoiada lived Joash served Yahweh; but when the priest was dead, and was laid in the royal tomb at Jerusalem in reward for his services to Yahweh and the house of David, Joash was led away by the flattery of his followers, and together with all the people he deserted the temple of Yahweh, and served *asherahs* and idols. Vain were all the warnings of the prophets, for Joash would not hearken; and at last when Zachariah, the son of Jehoiada, prophesied against him in the forecourt of the temple, and threatened Judah with the wrath of Yahweh, he ordered him to be stoned to death. "May Yahweh see it and repay it!" cried the dying Zachariah; and his curse was fulfilled by the woe that Hazael brought upon Joash, and by his wretched end; for when he came back wounded from battle with the Syrians, he was murdered by two of his courtiers.

This story is as inaccurate as most of those in the book of Chronicles. The accusation brought against Joash of having deserted the temple and the service of Yahweh, with all his people, is too vague and too sweeping to be admitted. But the older historian mentions in a few words Jehoiada's great influence upon the king for good, and also tells us how the latter fell by the hand of conspirators, though he knows nothing of his having received any wounds from the Syrians, which would indeed be strange, since he never fought with Hazael at all, but bought him off, as we have seen. It is therefore quite possible that the succession of events may

have been as follows : After Jehoiada's death, Joash lost the affection of many of his subjects ; and when Zachariah, Jehoiada's son, made himself the mouthpiece of the malcontents he was put to death, not without complicity on the part of the king, upon whom, accordingly, his murder was revenged. In what respect the conduct of Joash underwent so great a change we do not know, but it is not difficult to guess ; for we know that twenty-three years after he came to the throne he began to put some check upon the arrogance of the priests, who were letting the temple fall into ruins and appropriating all its revenues. The priests were doubtless far from pleased, but as long as Jehoiada was alive and sided with the king, all violent collisions were avoided. After the death of his benefactor, however, Joash may have carried out his measures with greater violence and harshness. The mediator between him and the priests was no more ; and if Zachariah presumed too much upon his father's services, it is not difficult to see what the result would be. Joash, who had probably been more or less hampered for some time past by his desire to treat the hoary Jehoiada with respect, would now be in no mood to yield to the pretensions of his son, and may very well have uttered a hasty word to the effect that he wished he were well rid of the insolent priest. When his followers took him at his word and found means to incite the populace to stone the king's enemy, the powerful clan that ministered at Yahweh's altar avenged themselves by murdering the king. But this view of the connection of events is only conjectural.

Joash was succeeded by his son Amaziah, whose first care was to bring his father's murderers to justice ; but we are expressly informed¹ that he did not put the sons of the murderers to death, because it was written in the law-book of Moses : "The fathers shall not be put to death for the sins

¹ 2 Kings xiv. 5, 6 ; 2 Chronicles xxv. 3, 4.

of their children, nor the children for those of their parents ; but whoever has done what is worthy of death, must bear the punishment himself." Here the historians have fallen into a mistake, for the book of law in which these words are found¹ was not written in Amaziah's time. In this as in so many other instances the practice was reformed before the precept. About this period, therefore, the general sense of justice and humanity triumphed over the barbarous custom of not only slaying the offender, but rooting out his whole family with him.

In a subsequent chapter we shall see how Amaziah reigned in considerable prosperity at first, but finally lost his crown. Here we need only add a few words on the power of the priests at Jerusalem.

We have already traced out the conceptions upon which the influence of a priesthood is based, and have observed the germs of a future hierarchy in Israel.² Now it followed, from the nature of the case, that the servants of the sanctuary at Jerusalem must have great advantages over all others. Living as they did in the immediate neighbourhood of the palace, and in constant requisition to place their art at the service of the king, they had certainly less freedom and independence than was enjoyed by other priests ; but at the same time the honour paid to the royal sanctuary was reflected upon its servants, and they might easily turn their connection with the court to account in extending their own influence. The chief priests were often in the palace, and took their place amongst the king's most intimate advisers ;³ and even priests of a subordinate rank were sometimes entrusted with important political functions. Thus David, when flying from Absalom, chose the sons of the priests to bring him word of

¹ Deuteronomy xxiv. 16.

² Vol. II. pp. 183—185.

³ 2 Samuel viii. 17, xx. 25 ; 1 Kings iv. 4.

what was going on in Jerusalem, and Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok, served him as a messenger. Amongst Solomon's ministers of state Azariah, the son of Zadok the priest, is mentioned first,¹ and Zabud, the son of Nathan, appears as a priest and as "the king's friend."² Conversely, too, David's sons are said to have been priests,³ and it is quite probable that they really exercised the priestly functions, as David himself did when the ark was brought to Jerusalem, and as Solomon did at the consecration of the temple.⁴

The disruption of the kingdom struck a heavy blow at the general prestige of the priests of Jerusalem, no less than at that of their king; but, on the other hand, it greatly strengthened their influence in Judah itself. As long as the twelve tribes were united, the temple at Jerusalem, though the principal sanctuary in the kingdom, had many rivals, some of them, such as the *bamah* at Gibeon, very near, but the most formidable, such as those at Beersheba, Gilgal, Bethel, Mount Carmel, and Dan, at a more or less considerable distance. Now, the disruption of the kingdom, while depriving the priests of Jerusalem of all influence in the North, enabled them to overshadow their colleagues in Judah all the more completely, and to reduce them to entire dependence upon themselves.

The course of events during the first century after Solomon's death was exactly calculated to increase the power of the priesthood at Jerusalem. There were no great civil or religious conflicts here, as there were in northern Israel. There all the agitations caused at first by the changes of dynasty, and afterwards by the struggle against Baal, had conspired to raise the prophets into the position of popular leaders; and their influence naturally impaired that of the

¹ 1 Kings iv. 2.

² 1 Kings iv. 5, where *priest* should stand instead of *principal officer*.

³ 2 Samuel viii. 18, where *priests* should stand for *chief rulers*.

⁴ 2 Samuel vi. 14, 17, 18; 1 Kings viii. 54, 55, 64.

priests. But in Judah this was not the case. We have not a single trustworthy report of the appearance of a prophet in Judah during the two first centuries after the disruption, for the stories in Chronicles deserve no credence. The priests accordingly became more and more firmly established as the spiritual leaders of the people.

The worship of Baal was not so long established in Judah as in the northern kingdom; and consequently the reaction against it gave a less powerful stimulus to the religious life of the exclusive worshippers of Yahweh. Accordingly, no prophet led the people in their attack upon the Syrian god; but it was the chief priest, Jehoiada, who brought about the fall of Athaliah, with the help of the body-guard. It was only natural that this Jehoiada, who had placed the king upon the throne and was his chief adviser all his life, should have done much towards increasing the power of the priesthood. It is far from accidental that in his day the temple was restored, and the duties and privileges of the priests regulated.

Jehoiada appears to have been anything but friendly to the prophets, for one of the measures he took in the interests of public worship was to entrust the preservation of order within the precincts of the temple to a strong body of officers, who were instructed, amongst other things, to "put any mad fellow who prophesies into the stocks, with a chain round his neck."¹ Even in the northern kingdom we have seen² a band of military messmates, as they were laughing together over their wine, call one of the "inspired" servants of Yahweh a madman; but this by no means shows that the prophets were in any way slighted, or put under restraint. A title, however, which means little or nothing in the mouths of a jovial company of soldiers, becomes profoundly significant now that it has found its way into the official instructions issued to the guardians of the temple. In itself,

¹ Jeremiah xxix. 26.

² See p. 175.

however, such a regulation is by no means surprising; for a priest, whose duties are of an essentially formal character, and who has constantly to conduct religious ceremonies in accordance with fixed regulations, is by his very nature opposed to the prophet, who will not hear of a written law, but speaks out in accordance with the impulse from within the thing that his god reveals. Prophets and priests accordingly must almost inevitably come into collision with each other. In the temple especially, where everything had to be done in the prescribed form, the prophets might easily introduce confusion; and it was not unnatural that Jehoiada should take measures to restrain them within due limits, when he regulated the temple service.

The priests, in their turn, were reduced by Jehoiada's ordinances to dependence upon the king, and an end was put to their irresponsible appropriation of the rich temple revenues; but, on the other hand, the officiating families were now secured in the receipt of a regular income, and had a more definite position in the state assigned them. Individually, the members of the priestly order might find the old state of affairs preferable, but some restriction of personal liberty was highly conducive to the general influence of the priesthood as a body.

In Solomon's time Zadok, of the tribe of Levi, stood, as we know, at the head of the priests of Jerusalem. Now, in ancient times the tie that united the various members of one family was very close, and it was considered one of the first duties of the head of a clan to push his relatives forward. It was inevitable, therefore, that all the offices at the great sanctuary should gradually be filled by members of the "house of Zadok;" that is to say, by the sons and other relatives of the chief priest, together with their dependents. And since Levites had begun to be selected as priests in preference to others long before the temple was built, we may

assume that in Solomon's time most of the *bamahs* were under the care of Levites. These Levites would, in many instances, espouse the cause of their brothers at Jerusalem, who, in their turn, would use their influence at court to secure to some member of the tribe any good place which might from time to time fall vacant at any of the sanctuaries. Thus all but Levites were gradually excluded from the priestly office, and "the sons of Levi" became the only priests in Judah.

The more completely the Levites developed into a priestly caste, the greater was the danger that threatened the spiritual life of Judah; for priests are always apt to concentrate their attention upon their temples, altars, religious practices and ceremonies—in a word, upon the externals of religion. If they gain a complete ascendancy over their fellow-believers, then the faithful become their absolute slaves, religion degenerates into formalism, and the life of the soul is choked by observance of the Law.

We shall presently see that Judah did not escape these dangers.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE EARLIEST ISRAELITISH LAW BOOK.

Exodus XXI.—XXIII. 19.

WHEN speaking of King Jehoshaphat, of Judah, we mentioned in passing that the book of Chronicles represents him as having done a great deal towards regulating the administration of justice. We will now examine the statement¹ more in detail. Jehoshaphat, we are told, appointed judges in all the cities, and exhorted them to fear Yahweh, and to remember that partiality, injustice, and

¹ 2 Chronicles xix. 5—11.

venality, were contrary to his will. Moreover, he established a supreme court at Jerusalem to watch over the religious and social interests of his kingdom. In this court both priests and Levites on the one hand, and laymen on the other, had seats; the former under the presidency of the high priest, the latter under that of "the prince of the house of Judah." To this court the other judges were to come for instructions when any question was too hard for them to decide themselves. This college of judges at Jerusalem, then, was not a tribunal to which those who felt aggrieved by the decision of a lower court might appeal. Any such procedure was excluded by the belief that the sentence of every judge was a word of God, from which any appeal to a higher authority was inconceivable. It was only if the judge himself felt unable to pronounce a decision that the case was taken before the court in Jerusalem.

We are hardly entitled to accept it as a fact that Jehoshaphat made any such regulations as these, on the mere authority of the book of Chronicles, which so consistently exalts this prince. At any rate the distinction here drawn between priests, that is sons of Aaron, and other Levites, certainly dates from a later period. But of course the administration of justice must have been gradually regulated as time went on. The legend of Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, advising him to appoint judges,¹ brings vividly before us the causes which induced the monarchs to take this matter in hand. The more thoroughly the Israelites became accustomed to the settled government of the kings, and understood that each of them must no longer do what seemed good in his own eyes, the more numerous did the cases become in which they needed the decision of their king as the supreme judge. Remember, for instance, the account of Absalom standing at the city gate of Jerusalem to win over all those who, from

¹ Compare Vol. II., p. 89.

every part of the kingdom, came to appeal to David.¹ The administration of justice, therefore, gradually became a task too heavy for the shoulders of the king alone, and it seemed advisable that there should be judges in each of the principal cities. Where none were already established, the king would of course be the natural person to appoint them; and the establishment of a supreme court at Jerusalem would follow as a matter of course. No doubt some similar provision was made in Samaria.

It is uncertain when the administration of justice was first regulated on this general plan. We only know that the scheme was in full operation two and a half centuries after Jehoshaphat; for the book of Deuteronomy² assumes the existence of numerous local courts of justice and of the supreme court at Jerusalem, and warns all the judges very emphatically that they must render implicit obedience to the precepts of the Levitical priests and "the judge in the place which Yahweh shall choose." Indeed, anyone who defies these supreme authorities is declared guilty of death.

The special date at which these regulations were introduced is a matter of less importance than the character of the religious, moral, and social principles in accordance with which justice was administered, or at any rate ought to have been administered in the opinion of the most enlightened Israelites. What these principles were we may to some extent gather from the book of law contained in Exodus xxi.—xiii. 19.

There is something to be said in support of the belief that this book was written in the first century after the disruption, but this is by no means certain. Nor can we be sure that it was composed in the kingdom of Judah. In the book of Exodus it appears in the middle of a story that we shall deal with later on, dating from the time of the fall of

¹ See pp. 56, 57.

² Deuteronomy xvi. 18—xvii. 12.

northern Israel, but it is certainly older than this story itself, and is at any rate the oldest Israelitish book of law that we possess. Let us see what it contains.

The subject matter of the code is extremely varied, and we cannot lay too much stress upon the fact that it gives neither the first nor the chief place to the regulation of forms of worship. It is very clear that its compilers believed that a virtuous life was the most acceptable service that could be offered to Yahweh. It is true the code enjoins the observance of the three feasts, which, according to the historians, were celebrated in Jerusalem as early as in the time of Solomon,¹ namely, the feast of unleavened bread, the feast of first-fruits, and the feast of harvest; but all it says concerning them is that every male Israelite must appear before Yahweh on these occasions, of course not empty-handed; that all the bread used at sacrifices must be unleavened; and that the fat of a sacrificed beast must not be kept till the following day.² When we compare these simple precepts with the elaborate trivialities of a later day, we are pleased to see how little importance was as yet attached to minute regulations of ceremonial worship by the guiding spirits of the ninth century B.C. But, of course, the code extols liberality in making presents to the sanctuary. The Israelite is to relinquish the first-fruits of his corn, olive, and grape harvest; to buy off his first-born son by a substitutionary sacrifice; to dedicate the firstlings of all his clean beasts to Yahweh on the eighth day; and to present all these first-fruits to him in his sanctuary.³

We must not suppose, however, from this moderation in prescribing so-called religious duties, that the worshippers of Yahweh observed no other usages than those which we

¹ 1 Kings ix. 25.

² Exodus xxiii. 14—18.

³ Exodus xxii. 29, 30, xxiii. 19a.

have mentioned. On the contrary, their religious customs were numerous and varied. This very code forbids the Israelites to eat the flesh of any animal that has been killed by a beast of prey.¹ It also forbids them to boil a kid in its mother's milk,² and commands them to observe the sabbath and to let the land lie fallow every seventh year.³ Doubtless these are only a few of the usages established by custom amongst the worshippers of Yahweh, and enforced by many of his priests. Only to mention a single point, there can be no doubt that the distinction between clean and unclean foods existed when this code was drawn up; but remarkably enough both this and many other religious usages are passed over in absolute silence here, being considered of less importance apparently than the points upon which stress is laid.

The matters most insisted on have reference to social topics, and are treated in a spirit which commands our special admiration when we consider the period at which the precepts were issued. First of all come the laws of slavery.⁴ Of course, the law-giver has no idea of abolishing this institution, which was as natural in ancient times as it is monstrous and detestable in our own. So far from thinking of putting an end to it, our law-giver even declares that, although a man who kills his male or female slave upon the spot must pay for the offence with his own life, yet if he inflicts such injuries upon them that they live for a day or two and then die, he need not be punished at all, inasmuch as "this slave is his own property."⁵ Nevertheless he endeavours to soften the lot of the slaves as much as possible, though he makes a distinction in this respect, thoroughly characteristic of the age, between a Hebrew and a foreign slave. An Israelite must not be retained as a slave permanently, but must be

¹ Exodus xxii. 31.² Exodus xxiii. 19b.³ Exodus xxiii. 10—12.⁴ Exodus xxi. 2—11.⁵ Exodus xxi. 20, 21.

restored to liberty without any ransom after six years' service. If he was married when he became a slave, as was often the case with debtors, then his wife must be released with him; but if he had married while a slave, his wife and children remained the property of his master. Should he prefer slavery to freedom, which might well be the case if he had married while a slave and had a family, his master must take him to a sanctuary of Yahweh, and there bore his ear with an awl to the door-post, which signified that he was his slave for life. The law-giver insisted, with especial earnestness, that if a man should take a female slave for an inferior wife, as Abraham and Jacob did in the legend, he should treat her well.

That the lawgiver's penal code is severe, and that he does not shrink from exacting the penalty of death is only what we should expect. A man who kills another,¹ even by accident, must be put to death, unless he can escape to a place of refuge such as an altar; but even this is no protection to a deliberate murderer. Again, whoever raises his hand against father or mother, or even curses them,² must be put to death, and so must kidnappers.³ Finally, the same penalty is enacted against everything regarded as preeminently Canaanitish, namely witchcraft, unnatural lust, and idolatry.⁴

Compared with many another code, even of modern times, these Israelitish laws of the ninth century B.C. are decidedly merciful. The extreme penalty of death is only enacted in comparatively few cases; and with regard to personal injuries the fierceness of revenge is tempered by the law of retribution, "eye for eye, tooth for tooth;" whereas in the numerous cases in which a man is more or less directly responsible for injuries which have befallen another, very

¹ Compare Vol. I., p. 105.

² Exodus xxi. 12—15, 17.

³ Exodus xxi. 16; compare Vol. II., p. 358.

⁴ Exodus xxii. 18—20.

equitable rules of compensation are laid down, and the opportunity is often given to the offender of atoning for his deed by the payment of a fine.¹

Theft is to be punished by the infliction of a fine of four or five times the value of the stolen property, and in default the culprit may be taken or sold as a slave. Under certain circumstances a person suspected of a theft which he denies may clear himself by an oath. A man who has deceived a woman must marry her instantly, unless her father should refuse to allow it, in which case the culprit must pay him the ordinary amount of a woman's dowry.²

The passages in the code which most excite our admiration are its exhortations to humanity:³ "Never oppress a stranger, for you yourselves were strangers once in Egypt, and know how weary is the stranger's lot. Injure no widow or orphan, for Yahweh listens to their cries, and will inflict a fearful punishment. Exact no usury from your poor brothers. If you have taken a poor man's coat in pledge return it to him before sun-set, for he will need it to cover him at night. Neither bear false witness nor pronounce false judgment to please the populace. Neither give the great⁴ any preference in pronouncing judgment, nor oppress the poor." And mark the noble spirit of the precept that follows! "If you see your enemy's ox or ass going astray, or falling under its burden, you must take it back to him, and must leave your own work to help it up." The claims of humanity reigned so supreme in the mind of this lawgiver that he insists upon the observance of the sabbath expressly for sake of the male and female slaves, who must have rest, he urges, just as much as other people; and the reason he gives for wishing the fields, the vineyards, and the olive gardens to be left untilled, and hold a sabbath every seventh year, is that the poor may then

¹ Exodus xxi. 22—36.

² Exodus xxii. 1—17.

³ Exodus xxii. 21—27, xxiii. 1—12.

⁴ After an amended version.

be allowed to come and take whatever grows of itself, and that the beasts may have what they leave. Now, however mistaken such a law may be in the interests of the poor themselves, whom it would throw out of work every seventh year, yet the fact that the law-giver rests the religious observance upon this ground rather than upon any other, is a striking proof of his kindly disposition.

It is obvious at once that this book of law differs in many essential respects from a modern code. It may be said to exhort rather than to ordain. This is natural enough; for the code was not promulgated by any person or corporation who had power to enforce it, and it depended largely for its observance on the conscience and the personal convictions of the several judges, who were only partially controlled by public opinion. A code of laws in Israel was not so much a set of enactments to the letter of which the judge was bound, as a general guide to the spirit in which he was to act.

A book of law such as we have just examined does not teach us the pressing necessities of the age and the manner in which they were met, but reveals the spirit by which the best Israelites of the period were actuated; and the admiration which we feel for so much that is contained in the code greatly stimulates our interest in the history of Israel's religion.

The fact is that when we think of the opinions which the ancient worshippers of Yahweh entertained concerning their god, and the way in which they thought they could serve and propitiate him, we sometimes ask ourselves: What does it really signify that the worship of this Yahweh was preserved? What would it have mattered if the altars, *massebahs*, *asherahs*, and what not, that were used in the service of Yahweh, had gradually been diverted to the worship of Baal or Astarte, of Chemosh or Milcom?—In itself it would matter nothing. Whether the ancients sought to appease Yahweh with an

offering or preferred to sacrifice to Baal comes to exactly the same thing. Whether they held the pig and the hare in abomination as unclean beasts, or brought them in preference to all other creatures to the altar, is not of the smallest consequence. Whether they sanctified the seventh day of the week as a day of rest, or rather celebrated the feast of the new moon, made them neither better nor worse. The salvation of the world does not depend on outward things like these. But it is very closely connected with the triumph of morality. If, as was really the case with the masses, the service of Yahweh had only differed in names, in ceremonies, and in outward usages of religion from the service of the other gods, then it might have fallen, as the worship of hundreds of gods and goddesses has fallen, without any loss to the world. But when we see that the kernel of these worshippers of Yahweh maintained the claims of morality, and felt that Israel's god was best served by uprightness, by honour, chastity, humanity, and the spirit of good-will; then we begin to take a deep and genuine interest in the history of the worship of their god.

And this is why we rejoiced in Yahweh's triumph over Baal alike in Judah and in northern Israel.

CHAPTER XVII.

ISRAEL UNDER JEROBOAM II.

2 KINGS XIV.; PSALM XLV.; DEUTERONOMY XXXIII.

ABOUT the year 825 B.C. the two Israelitish kingdoms were alike prosperous. In the North, Joash had already been on the throne for fifteen years. He had defeated the Syrians repeatedly, and had reconquered from them a great part of the territory they had wrested from his predecessors. In Judah, Amaziah had waged war against

the Edomites with such complete success that even their capital, Selah or Petra, had fallen into his hands. But at the end of his campaign in Edom, Amaziah sought a quarrel with Joash, who sent the following answer to his challenge: "Once on a time the thistle of Lebanon sent a message to the cedar of Lebanon, and said, 'Give my son your daughter for his wife.' But, meanwhile, the wild beasts walked over the thistle and trampled it down. And now the thistle's fate will be yours. You have beaten the Edomites, and had better stop at home and boast your prowess there! Why should you rush upon your own ruin?" But Amaziah was not to be put off; and, indeed; the contemptuous tone of the warning given him by Joash was hardly calculated to divert him from his purpose. So he brought his army into the field, but was utterly routed at Beth-shemesh. Amaziah himself fell into the conqueror's hands, and Jerusalem surrendered. The victorious army marched in triumph through a breach in the wall, and Joash returned to Samaria, carrying with him the treasures of Yahweh's temple and the royal palace, and the noblest Judæans as hostages. Thus Judah became a province of Israel.

The Chronicler has a good deal to add. He tells us¹ that when Amaziah reckoned up the forces which he could bring into the field against the Edomites, he found his army too small, though it numbered three hundred thousand heavy-armed soldiers. So he hired a hundred thousand Israelite mercenaries for a hundred talents (thirty or forty thousand pounds) as auxiliaries. As he was on the point of setting out with this army, a certain prophet came to him and commanded him, in Yahweh's name, to dismiss these mercenaries, for Israel's god would have no dealings with the Ephraimites. Amaziah was only to muster his own troops, for his god could give the victory to whom he would. "But what of all

¹ 2 Chronicles xxv.

the money I have paid them already?" cried Amaziah, for he could not bear to think of spending so much treasure for nothing. "Yahweh can give you more than that," said the man of God; and, thus encouraged, the king dismissed his auxiliaries. But the Israelites themselves were deeply offended by the insult, and in revenge they attacked the cities of Judah, slew three thousand men, and made enormous booty, while Amaziah's army was still in Edom. This monarch's subsequent defeat at the hands of Joash was only what he deserved; for, when he had conquered the Edomites, he worshipped their gods. A certain prophet warned him of his sin, but he answered haughtily, "Who made you the king's counsellor? Hold your peace, or you shall be whipped!" Then the man of God forbore to warn him further, and said with a sigh, "I see that God has determined to destroy you! For if not, you would have listened to my counsel." The justice of his surmise appeared from Amaziah's arrogance towards Joash, and the ruin in which it involved him.

The enormous figures which appear in this account are, as we know, nothing unusual with the Chronicler; and the worship of Edom's gods by Amaziah is doubtless a pure supposition, made to account for the terrible humiliation suffered by a prince who was said to have "done what was right in the eyes of Yahweh."

Soon after conquering Jerusalem, king Joash died, and left a powerful kingdom to his son Jeroboam, whom we call Jeroboam II., to distinguish him from the first king of Israel. This monarch extended his rule far wider yet, for by his sword, as the Israelite historian boasts, Yahweh delivered Israel from the hand of the Syrians. All the territory that had been lost under his predecessors, Jeroboam recovered; and he so completely reunited the district beyond Jordan to his kingdom that during his reign the clans that were settled there were accurately enrolled by name and number in the

royal archives.¹ Thus the prophecy of Jonah, the son of Amittai, that Jeroboam should rule from Hamath to the Dead Sea, was literally fulfilled.—This Jonah, whose prophecy unfortunately is lost, is the hero of the little book called after him, to which we shall return in the next volume.

These boundaries, from Hamath to the Dead Sea, do not include Judah; and it appears that the kingdom, though completely humbled, made tributary, and forced to submission by the pledges of its good behaviour held by Joash, nevertheless retained a certain amount of independence. At any rate Amaziah remained at Jerusalem even after his defeat, and when he lost his life through a conspiracy, his son Uzziah, also called Azariah, succeeded him. All this appears exceedingly strange, for we cannot see why Joash should not have completely incorporated Judah with Israel when he had captured Jerusalem and carried away the hostages to Samaria. Were the Judæans so profoundly attached to the dynasty of David that Joash dreaded constant insurrections should it be displaced? It may be so. But there is a date given in the book of Kings² which makes us suspect that Joash really went much further than we are told. The statement referred to is this—that Uzziah did not become king of Judah till the twenty-seventh year of king Jeroboam of Israel. Now, since we are also told that Amaziah survived Joash only fifteen years,³ it follows that if Uzziah had succeeded him immediately his accession would have fallen in the fifteenth, not the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam. How are we to account for this gap of twelve years which appears to have elapsed between the death of Amaziah and the accession of his son? Does it not point to the conclusion that for some time the kings of northern Israel swayed the sceptre over Judah also? If so, the writer of the book of Kings, who held that the descendants of David were the

¹ 1 Chronicles v. 17.

² 2 Kings xv. 1.

³ 2 Kings xiv. 17.

only legal occupants of the throne of Judah,¹ fictitiously protracted the reign of Amaziah to the term of nine and twenty years² (that is to the end of his life), and then made his son succeed him without an interval. If this does not satisfy us we must suppose that there is a mistake in the year of Uzziah's accession.

But however we may explain the dates, and whether we suppose Uzziah to have been Jeroboam's acknowledged vassal till the seven and twentieth year of the latter's reign, or whether we believe Judah to have retained its position as a separate kingdom even after Amaziah's defeat, it is at any rate certain that to the day of his death Jeroboam held Judah more or less completely in his power; for he had a garrison in the important harbour of Elath, the key to the peninsula of Sinai, and it was not till after his death that Uzziah succeeded in recovering the place.³

Jeroboam's reign was one of the most prosperous and brilliant periods of Israel's history, and though unhappily we know but few particulars about it, the king himself is referred to in several poems which we still possess.

It is highly probable that the forty-fifth Psalm was composed on the occasion of one of Jeroboam's marriages; and this poem is so remarkable on many grounds that it deserves to be given at length. It runs as follows:—

My heart overflows with goodly words,

For it thinks: "I work for a king!"

May my tongue be like the pen of a skilful writer!

Thou art fairer than all the children of men;

Grace is poured out on thy lips;

Therefore Yahweh blesses thee for ever.

Gird on thy sword, O hero!

Thy glory and thine adornment.

¹ Compare Vol. II., p. 396.

² 2 Kings xiv. 2.

³ 2 Kings xiv. 22.

Ride forth in thy majesty,
To give proof of justice and righteous mercy !
Dread deeds shall thy right hand teach thee.
Sharp are thine arrows ;
Peoples sink under thee ;
To the heart of the king's enemies [they pierce].
Yahweh has established thy throne to eternity ;
A righteous sceptre is the sceptre of thy kingdom.
Thou lovest virtue and hatest iniquity ;
Therefore Yahweh, thy god, has anointed thee
With the oil of gladness above thy fellows.
In myrrh and aloes and cassia are thy garments steeped,
From ivory palaces¹ the sound of the harp rejoices thee.
The daughters of kings are amongst thy treasures ;
There stands the queen at thy right hand,
Adorned with the treasures of Ophir !
Listen, O daughter, see and incline thine ear !
Forget thy people and forget thy father's house !
The king longs for thy beauty ;
He is thy lord, do thou reverence him.
Tyre seeks to gain thy favour,
The richest Tyrians bring thee presents.
All glorious is the princess in her chamber ;
Her garments are wrought with gold.
In embroidered robes is she brought to the king ;
Maidens after her, her companions,
They likewise are brought to thee.
They are brought with joy and gladness ;
They enter the royal palace !
May thy sons succeed thy fathers ;
May'st thou make them princes in all the land !
I will praise thy name from generation to generation ;
That the tribes may glorify thee for ever.

¹ Compare 1 Kings xxii. 39.

Since two verses of this poem¹ are quoted in a very incorrect translation in the New Testament,² we had better dwell upon them for a moment longer. The passage I have rendered, "So Yahweh, thy god, has anointed thee," is usually translated "Therefore, O God! thy God has anointed thee;" and it is a fact that the Hebrew text does not contain the name of Yahweh. Now, to understand what right we have to read "Yahweh, thy god," in place of "God, thy god," you must know that in the book of Psalms, as we now have it, there is one section (Psalms xlii.—lxxxiii.) in which the name of *Yahweh* is seldom used (only forty-four times) and that of *God* very often (two hundred and six times); whereas in the rest of the psalms it is just the other way (*God* appearing twenty-three times and *Yahweh* six hundred and forty). The only explanation of this curious fact is the supposition that these psalms once formed a separate book by themselves, and that their collector preferred for some reason to speak of *God* rather than *Yahweh*, and therefore almost always changed the latter into the former when he found it in the poems he took up into his collection. We are, therefore, simply restoring the original words in rendering the passage, "Yahweh, thy god." It is certain, at any rate, that the poet never addressed his hero as "god," for however high the rank may be which this poem in common with other Hebrew utterances assigns to Yahweh's anointed, the Israelites never went the length of deifying their princes. In the seventh verse the Hebrew, as it stands, says, "Thy throne, God," but most likely a word has fallen out, and the poet really wrote "Yahweh has established thy throne."

The writer to whom we owe the introduction and the conclusion of our present book of Deuteronomy has taken up into his work a poem which was probably written in the

¹ Verses 6 and 7.

² Hebrews i. 8.

time of Jeroboam II. The author puts it into the mouth of Moses, as a blessing pronounced over the sons of Israel by him shortly before his death; but taken in its true historical setting, it may be regarded as one of the proofs of the power to which Israel rose under Jeroboam II., and the pride with which many of his subjects raised their heads as members of the "house of Jacob." This remarkable poem bears all the more striking witness to the enthusiasm felt by the people for Jeroboam, from the fact that it was written by a Judæan. It is a counterpart of the so-called "blessing of Jacob,"¹ and includes a longer or shorter prayer for each of the tribes except Simeon, which had completely melted into Judah. There are many obscure passages in the song, and here and there the translation is uncertain.

A short epitome of Israel's history opens the poem :

Yahweh came from Sinai
And went before them from Seir ;
His light streamed forth from the mount of Paran
And he came from the desert of Kadesh.
From his right hand came help for them ;
He truly loved the tribes.
All thy holy ones went with thee
And followed after thy feet.
And Moses preached thy words
And gave instruction to us.
The community of Jacob gained an inheritance
And there came a king to rule Jeshurun,
When the heads of the people gathered together
And Israel's tribes assembled.

"Jeshurun" appears again in this song as a name for Israel, and also in one other passage.² It is a play upon the sound of the name *Israel*, and signifies "the righteous" or

¹ Compare Vol. I., pp. 131, 394; Vol. II., p. 209.

² Deuteronomy xxxii. 15.

“the virtuous,” which accords perfectly with the designation of Israel's forefathers as “the holy ones.”

After this introduction come sayings appropriate to the several tribes. Reuben, who appears in the legends of the patriarchs as the eldest of the brothers, occupies the foremost place here also, though the poet has little to say of him, while he dwells with obvious sympathy upon the tribes comprised in the kingdom of Judah.

May Reuben live and not die !

May his numbers ne'er be few !

Hearken Yahweh ! to Judah's voice

And bring him back to his people !

May his territory spread afar,

May he be helped against his foes !

Break thou the loins of his enemies,

And let them that hate him rise no more !

Thy *thummim* and *urim* [O Yahweh!] are held by
thy Faithful One,

Whom thou didst try at Massah,

With whom thou didst strive at Meribah ;

Who says of his father and mother :

I care not for them !

Who denies his brothers

And regards not his very sons.

But they mark thy word,

They observe thy covenant,

They teach Jacob thy ordinances,

And Israel thy law ;

They make incense rise before thee

And bring sacrifices to thine altar,

O Yahweh ! bless their might

And accept the work of their hands in grace !

May Yahweh's Loved One dwell safely by Him
Who protects him ever,
And dwells between his shoulders.

It is obvious that "Yahweh's Loved One" is Benjamin, in whose district the great temple stood. The poet could therefore sing of Yahweh as sitting between the shoulders and on the neck of Benjamin. It is clear, also, that "Yahweh's Faithful One" is the priestly tribe of Levi; but we cannot explain the allusion to the trial at Massah and Meribah. These places are mentioned more than once in the accounts of Israel's wanderings in the desert,¹ but never in a connection that explains these words. They, probably, refer to a legend that has not come down to us.

The poet now goes on to the tribe of Joseph, or Ephraim and Manasseh, the glory of whose territory he first celebrates and then goes on:

May the favour of Him who dwells² in the bush come
upon Joseph's head,
On the crown of the prince of his brothers!
The first-born of his bullocks is noble;
His horns are like horns of a buffalo.
He hurls down the peoples with them,
The extremest peoples of earth!

The first-born of Joseph's bullocks means the king of Israel, in this case Jeroboam II.

The blessings on the remaining tribes contain nothing remarkable, except the honourable mention of a celebrated place of offering which was situated in the territory of Zebulon and Issachar, perhaps on Mount Carmel or Mount Tabor.

¹ Exodus xvii. 7; Numbers xx. 13; Deuteronomy ix. 22.

² Compare Exodus iii., 2 ff.

This is a fresh proof that at this period no one dreamed of confining legal sacrifices to Jerusalem. The verses run as follows :—

Rejoice in thy going out, Zebulon,
And Issachar in thy tents !
They call the tribes to the mountain,
And make true offerings there ;
For they draw to themselves what the seas produce
And the treasures hid in the sand.

The song concludes with the following words :—

There is no god like Jeshurun's god,
Who comes riding on the heaven to help thee,
In his glory upon the clouds.
That ancient god is a refuge,
Israel rests on his arms eternal.
He drove out thine enemies before thee,
And cried, " Destroy ! "
So Israel dwelt in safety,
The race of Jacob apart,
In a land of corn and wine,
Whose heavens drop down dew.
Hail to thee, Israel ! Who is like thee ?
Thou people victorious through Yahweh,
Who is the shield of thy succour ;
Who is the sword of thy glory !
Thine enemies come cringing before thee,
While thou treadest upon their heights !

This remarkable song deserves all the more attention from the circumstance that its author was a Judæan. This is evident from his putting Judah next after Reuben, and from the glowing terms in which he mentions the Levitical priesthood and the temple at Jerusalem. This Judæan, then, ex-

presses his wish that his country may be reunited with Israel, and dwells with great delight upon the king of Joseph's house. In all this he certainly did not stand alone, but expressed the conviction of many of his countrymen. It is therefore no very rash conjecture that the conspiracy which cost Amaziah his life aimed at the overthrow of the Davidic house and the complete incorporation of Judah with Israel. If this was so the conspirators were thwarted by the attachment of the "people of the land," that is to say, of the masses, to the house of David; and Uzziah succeeded to his father's throne.

Such were the feelings of the common people, for whom the grand conception of Israel's unity had no charm. But loftier natures kept the ideal clearly before their minds, not only in the North, where of course Judah's holding aloof from Ephraim was looked upon with disapproval, but even in the South, where many a one would have sacrificed the dynasty of David, whether joyfully or with regret, for the sake of making Yahweh's people one again.

This longing to see the two kingdoms united, springing from the belief that they *ought* to be so, finds striking expression in certain other writings of this period, which we must now examine from this special point of view. The eighth century B.C. was the period of Israel's greatest literary glory, which was chiefly due to the activity of the prophets. We have already examined much of what was committed to writing at this period, for it was the era of the Yahwist and the elder Elohists¹ (to be carefully distinguished from the younger Elohists, or author of the Book of Origins) whose narratives we still possess in the books of Genesis and Exodus, woven together, supplemented, and sometimes, alas! curtailed by the latest general editor of the Pentateuch. About this time the same or other writers composed a good

¹ See Vol I., pp. 307 ff.

many of the narratives about the Judges, Samuel, Saul, David, and his successors, which we still possess. It is impossible for us to fix with certainty how much of all this literature arose in northern Israel, and how much in Judah: but, if we possessed their separate works in a complete form, we should, perhaps, have cause to believe that the elder Elohists was an Ephraimite, and the Yahwist a Judæan, though this is little better than a guess in the present state of our knowledge. The question, however, is of no great consequence, for the religious positions occupied respectively by the best representatives of the two kingdoms resembled each other very closely, and so do those of the two authors in question.

Our first observation, then, upon the literary work of these prophets of the age of Jeroboam, is that they regarded Israel as one people. This is evident from their treatment of the generations before Moses. We have already observed¹ that the names of the patriarchs and many of the legends attached to them, properly belonged to special districts of the country. Thus Isaac was the mythical ancestor of the Israelite and Edomite tribes who dwelt in the South round Beersheba. Abram originally belonged to Judah, and Jacob (or Israel) to central and northern Palestine. Now these three patriarchs were about this time, we may suppose, brought into connection with each other as grandfather, father, and son, so that every section of the Israelitish people came into equally close relations with them all. Moreover the mutual relations of the tribes were regulated in the legends with great tact. All the twelve became sons of Jacob, that is of Israel itself; for though Ephraim and Manasseh, which really made up a single tribe, are represented in the story as sons of Joseph, yet Jacob expressly adopts them as his own.

The most difficult task was to assign to each tribe its due

¹ Vol. I., pp. 133—135, 212, 213.

meed of honour. Reuben, who had conquered his territory before any of the rest, was consequently firmly established as the eldest son; nor was he now degraded from this honour, for he was too weak to excite the jealousy of the others. But Joseph and Judah were very sensitive as to precedence. The legend then began by making them Jacob's sons by different wives. Judah was born next after Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, and was far older than Joseph; but Joseph was the first-born and for a long time the only son of Jacob's best-loved wife. His birth had been the sign for his father to return to Canaan; he was the most beloved of Jacob's sons, adorned with magnificent robes, blessed by Yahweh, the prince and deliverer of his brothers.

We must not suppose that all these legends were deliberately invented with the purpose we have implied, and then strung together with conscious art; for nothing of the kind took place. Much of the substance of the stories was already in existence, and was simply adopted or modified by the writers of this epoch. For instance, it was certainly an old tradition, and not an invention of the eighth century, that Esau and Jacob were twin brothers; whereas the story of Jacob's stealing his brother's blessing, and Isaac's prophecy that Esau should serve Jacob but would constantly throw off his yoke, describes the relations of the inhabitants of Judah with those of Seir during all the period from David to Amaziah. And in the same way myths and legends about Joseph were doubtless current in the North, and were now worked up and transformed by the prophetic writers, and brought into connection with the other patriarchal stories.

Accounts of Moses and the wanderings in the desert, of the conquest of Canaan and of the Judges, of Saul, David, and his successors, were easily linked on to the stories of the patriarchs; and the historians took especial pains to bring out their own predecessors, the prophets, into strong relief.

They celebrated their great deeds and their wide influence, but did not spare their faults, which they desired to hold up as warnings to their own contemporaries. We have often seen already that the historical good faith of these writers leaves much to be desired. They took up their pens not so much to give an accurate account of what had taken place in days of old, as to admonish and encourage their readers; and this purpose exercised no small influence upon the conceptions they formed of the heroes of times past. We may call to mind the striking example of Jerubbaal-Gideon,¹ who became under the hands of these historians a wholly different personage from what he had really been. They diligently studied the history of former generations, but their object in doing so was to magnify the glory of Yahweh, who had rescued and helped his people, and to exalt the people in whose midst he designed to dwell. The whole purpose and spirit of their work is contained in the lines:

Hail to thee Israel! Who is like thee?

A victorious people through Yahweh's might!

The ancient god is a refuge,

Who has brought us help from primeval times!

We must take this opportunity of fixing especial attention on the exalted conception of Yahweh's being which reigned in the hearts and minds of these writers. In discussing the ancient stories we have more than once remarked that the writers themselves evidently stood upon a higher level than that of the old legends they were working up.² To them Yahweh was no longer a god who could be seen by human eyes, with whom the denizens of earth could even wrestle, who ate and drank like a mortal, who only dwelt in Canaan, and only in certain spots even there, and could be carried

¹ See Vol. II., pp. 195—197.

² See Vol. I., p. 177; Vol. II., pp. 23, 24, 80.

who were straining all their powers in defending his worship and attacking that of Baal, should gradually rise to ever loftier conceptions of their god. The more they had to suffer for his sake the dearer he became to them, and the more clearly conscious they grew of the difference between him and Baal, with whom they involuntarily classed all other gods. The legend of the contest between Elijah and the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel admirably represents the inspiring conviction of the prophets of Yahweh, which their triumph deepened into absolute certainty: Baal is no god at all! He can send no fire down from heaven! And, though his servants cry to him with all their strength, he cannot hear, for he does not exist! But Yahweh does exist, and he is God—the True, the Only One!

This feeling was strengthened by the victories of Joash and Jeroboam II. over the Syrians. Under Jehu and Jehoahaz, Elisha could but appeal to Yahweh's might, and say that he would surely help his people; but, meanwhile, Israel was in sore distress. Doubtless, the servants of Baal ascribed this misery to the wrath of their god, and many a worshipper of Yahweh began to doubt; but those who persevered surrendered themselves up all the more unreservedly to their god, and now at last their fidelity was crowned with victory. Israel had become a mighty people; Israel had triumphed in the strength of Yahweh! Now it was certain that "Yahweh was the shield of Israel's help, the sword of his glory," and his triumphant people might well exclaim, "What god is like the god of Jeshurun?"

All the prophets vied with one another in glorifying Yahweh, with whose honour that of his people was so closely connected; but, of course, there were differences amongst them. One would follow out the truth more consistently than another, and declare more distinctly that the other gods did not exist; and, what is more important, some of them

recognised the moral character of Israel's god more clearly than their fellows did. While most of them simply looked upon Yahweh as mightier than other gods; the noblest revered him as the god of moral holiness, whose appointed service was a pure heart and clean hands.

We shall meet with repeated examples of this great distinction in the following chapters.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LEGEND OF BALAAM.

NUMBERS XXII. 2—XXIV.

THE legend of Balaam furnishes us with a very striking illustration of the lofty and glowing estimate of their people and its god which the Israelitish prophets and their spiritual allies had formed in the century of Jeroboam II. It is an entirely fictitious story, and nothing but a few of the names, at most, are borrowed from ancient Israelitish or foreign traditions. It professes to place us in the period just before the conquest of Canaan, but gives us a completely false conception of the circumstances of the Israelites at that time. Its contents are as follows:—

When the Israelites had conquered Sihon, king of the Amorites, Balak, the son of Zippor, king of the Moabites, conceived a mortal dread of the mighty people that was now pressing so close upon his territory. "Israel," he cried in terror to his allies, the chiefs of Midian, "Israel will lick us all up as an ox licks up the grass!" To avert this danger, therefore, he sent an embassy to Pethor, on the river Euphrates, with rich presents for the famous seer Balaam son of Beor, bearing this message: "Behold, there is a people come out of Egypt that covers all the land, and is encamped

right over against my kingdom. Come, then, and curse them for me, for they are too strong for me. Perchance I may then defeat them and drive them out; for whom you bless is blessed indeed, and whom you curse is cursed." When Balak's emissaries had given Balaam their message, he invited them to spend the night in his own house, and promised to tell them in the morning what Yahweh had said to him. They consented; and in the night the deity appeared to Balaam, as he had expected, and asked him who his guests might be. The seer then informed him of the purpose of their visit, upon which Yahweh forbade him to return with them to curse Israel, inasmuch as this people was blessed. Obedient to God's command Balaam dismissed the Moabites, and would not consent to accompany them.

But Balak determined to try once more. He would see whether Balaam's resolution might not be overcome; and accordingly he sent a more numerous and distinguished embassy than ever, with magnificent promises of promotion and reward, if only the seer would come and curse this people! But the mighty soothsayer replied, "Though Balak should give me his house full of silver and gold, yet could I not turn in anything, great or small, from the commands of Yahweh." Nevertheless, he invited the messengers once more to remain with him that night, for it was possible that Yahweh might again reveal his will. It fell out as he had hoped, and this time the divine permission was secured: "If those men have come again with the same request, then go with them; but only say what I command you." So Balaam saddled his ass the next morning, and set out with Balak's nobles.

But Yahweh was angry with him for what he did, and sent an angel to chastise him. Now, Balaam was riding on his beast, followed by two slaves, when the angel met him, and stood across his path with a naked sword in his hand.

The wizard saw nothing, and had he ridden on he would inevitably have fallen by the angel's hand; but he was rescued by his ass, who saw the angel and turned off the path into the open field, upon which Balaam beat her severely, and turned her into the path again. Then the angel went further on and stood before the traveller in a narrow path that ran between two vineyard walls, and the ass, who still saw better than her rider, started aside in terror and crushed his leg against one of the walls. Enraged by these freaks, as he thought them, on the part of his beast, the seer beat her again, and the angel once more vanished and let him go on his way. But the third time he stood before him in a path so narrow that it was impossible to pass on either side. Still Balaam saw nothing of his foe, but the ass saw him and lay down in the pathway. The seer now lost all patience, and beat his ass unmercifully with his stick, upon which Yahweh gave her the power of speech, and she asked, "What have I done to deserve these three beatings?" "You are so obstinate," cried Balaam, in a fury, "that if I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you!" Then the beast, as if to make him think that there must be some good reason for her conduct, said again: "Am I not your ass, upon which you always ride? and have I ever done this before?" Balaam confessed she had not, and upon this Yahweh opened the magician's eyes, and he saw the angel with drawn sword standing across his path! He bowed down in reverent humility, as the angel cried reproachfully, "Why have you beaten your ass three times? I came out to meet you as your foe; for who acts against my will acts at his peril!"¹ And unless your ass had seen me and had gone aside, I should have slain you and let her go unhurt." The seer was now thoroughly abashed, and could only stammer, "I knew not that you stood before me in the way. But if it seems good to you that I should now

¹ The translation is here conjectural.

go back, I will go!" The angel said there was no need of that. He might go on with Balak's messengers, but must beware of saying anything but what Yahweh commanded.

It would be no easy task to obey this injunction strictly, for Balak came to meet the seer at the very borders of the land, and asked him why he had not come at first. Did he suppose that Moab's king could not reward him worthily? But Balaam hastened to put his mission on its true footing. "Now that I am here," he said, "I cannot tell that it is for your good! I cannot utter a single word that my god lays not on my lips."

When they reached the "Street-town" a magnificent feast was held in honour of the seer, and the next morning Balak took him to "the heights of Pisgah," whence he could see the long boundary-line of Israel's war-tents. Here Balaam told the king to have seven altars built, and an ox and a ram prepared for sacrifice on each. When the seer had offered up the victims he left the king standing by the altar, and he himself went a little way apart, in the hope that Yahweh might meet him and give him an oracle.

No sooner had the wizard reached an open place from which he could observe the signs of heaven than his god came to him. Balaam told him how he had built him seven altars and made sacrifices on them, upon which Yahweh laid an oracle upon his lips. Then he returned to Balak, whom he found by the altar surrounded by the nobles of Moab, but instead of cursing Israel he burst into this song of praise:

From Syria has Balak brought me,
Moab's king from the eastern heights:
"Come, curse me Jacob,
"Come, defy me Israel!"
How shall I curse whom God curses not,
And defy whom Yahweh defies not?

From the top of the rocks I see him,
From the hills I look down upon him :
See ! It is a people that dwells apart
And is not reckoned among the nations.¹
Who can measure the dust of Jacob
Or count the fourth part of Israel ?
May I die the death of the Upright²
May my seed be like him !

Dismayed and disappointed, Balak cried, " What is this that you have done ? I sent for you to curse my enemies, and now you have blessed them beyond measure ! " But the seer retorted at once, " Must I not say what Yahweh bids me ? neither more nor less ? "

Upon this the king begged Balaam to follow him to another spot, from which he could only see a portion of Israel's camp, and try whether he could not utter a curse when standing there.—What a strange confusion of ideas ! Though the prophet's word was the word of God, yet it was evidently supposed that any external circumstance which influenced his own frame of mind would very likely affect the oracle he was about to utter.³ This is really an admission that the prophecy came from the seer's own heart, and was not revealed to him from without. Balak, then, conducted the great magician to the " Watchman's Acre," on the top of Mount Pisgah. There the same steps were taken as before to compel the deity to vouchsafe a revelation—in accordance with the king's wishes if possible,—and again Yahweh came to Balaam and told him what he must say. When the seer returned Balak stood waiting for him by the altar with his nobles, as before ; and while he was still at some little distance the king cried eagerly, " And what says Yahweh now ? " Whereupon Balaam answered :

¹ See p. 120.

² See p. 250.

³ Compare pp. 171, 172.

Stand up, O Balak ! and hear.

Harken to me, O son of Zippor !

God is not a man that he should lie,

Or a son of man that he should repent.

Would he say a thing and then not do it ?

Would he promise and not perform ?

Behold ! I was bidden to bless,

And this blessing I may not recall.

No misery is seen in Jacob,

Nor sorrow perceived in Israel ;

Yahweh, his god, is with him,

A right royal shout in his midst.

God has led him out of Egypt ;

His might is like to a buffalo's.

No charm has force against Jacob,

Nor magic, power on Israel ;

When it is said of Jacob

And of Israel : " God does wonders ! "

See ! it is a people that stands like a lioness

And rises up like a lion,

Who lies not down till he has eaten the prey

And drunk the blood of the slaughtered.

Then Balak cried in bitterness of soul, " If you cannot curse them, at least you need not bless them ! " But Balaam answered : " Did I not tell you from the first that I should say what Yahweh bade me ? " " Well, then ! " returned the king, " let us try again in another place ! Perhaps it may please the deity to let you curse them there ! " Balaam complied, but Balak's desperate persistency was only to cover him afresh with utter dismay ; for when they had taken their stand on the top of Mount Peor, overlooking the plain, and had built seven altars there and sacrificed upon them, Balaam did not so much as step aside, for he had no need of his magic arts to learn the will of Yahweh ! No sooner had he turned

his face to the desert where Israel lay encamped, tribe by tribe, than he was seized by the spirit of his god, and cried :

The oracle of Balaam, son of Beor :
The word of the man of unclosed eyes,
Who hears the word of God,
And knows the knowledge of the Most High,
Who sees the sight of the Almighty ;
Who bows down, and his eyes are unveiled :

How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob ;
Thy dwellings, Israel !
Like spreading streams ;
Like gardens by the river ;
Like aloes planted by Yahweh ;
Like cedars by the streams.
Water flows out from his buckets,
And his new-sown fields are richly watered.
His king is taller than Agag ;¹
His kingdom is exalted.
His god brought him forth from Egypt ;
And he has a buffalo's strength.
He devours the peoples that oppose him ;
He grinds their bones ;
He breaks their loins.
He crouches like a lion for the spring ;
Like a lioness ;—who shall provoke him ?
A blessing shall rest upon him who blesses you ;
A curse upon him who curses !

Boiling with indignation, Balak struck his hands together in token of contempt and anger, and exclaimed with bitter emphasis : “ I bid you come to curse my enemies to their destruction, but you have blessed them these three times ! And

¹ Compare 1 Samuel xv. 8.

now make all the speed you may on your homeward journey, for Yahweh has bereft you of all the wealth and honour I had promised you !” But Balaam retorted once again : “ Did I not tell your messengers at first, that though you gave me your house full of silver and gold, I could say neither good nor evil of myself, but could only say what Yahweh told me ? But now that I am here, let me tell you, before I go back to my own land, what this people shall do to your people, in the far-off days to come !” Without waiting for Balak’s permission the seer began once more :

The oracle of Balaam, son of Beor :
The word of the man of unclosed eyes,
Who hears the word of God,
And knows the knowledge of the Most High ;
Who sees the sight of the Almighty ;
Who bows down, and his eyes are unveiled :—

I see him, but not as he now is ;
I behold him, but not from near ;
There is a star rising out of Jacob,
A sceptre comes up out of Israel,
Smiting the temples of Moab,
The skull of all sons of the war-cry !
Edom shall be a conquered province ;
Seir, his enemy, a possession ;
And Israel shall wax mighty.
A ruler shall come out of Jacob,
And destroy those that flee from the city.

After a moment’s pause the seer turned to the land of the Amalekites and cried :

Though Amalek be the first of peoples,
Yet shall his children fall in ruin !

There was another pause ; and then Balaam turned towards the southern district of Canaan, where the Kenites dwelt, and prophesied :

Though thy dwelling be so firm
And thy nest (*ken*) built on the rock ;
Yet shall ken be slowly destroyed
Till Ashur take him captive away.

It is as if, in uttering this last name of dread, the seer had for a moment sunk in terror ! But hope soon gleamed in his eye once more, and he cried aloud :

Alas ! but who shall live
Longer than God allows !
Ships that come from Cyprus
They shall oppress Ashur,
Shall oppress that people beyond Euphrates,
And it too shall be destroyed !

Then Balaam went back to his own country, and Balak to his home.

This is a fine story in many respects, but its author has succeeded very ill in his attempt to transport his readers to the time of Moses. The fact is that he himself had a thoroughly false conception of the circumstances of his people in those days. His mentioning Midian at the beginning and Amalek at the close of his narrative is the only circumstance that gives it the least air of antiquity. Everything else is quite out of keeping with the state of things in the thirteenth century B.C. Even suppose the tribes of Israel had ever been united in a single camp, the Moabites, who are here represented as their foes, were in reality their allies, the Edomites were at any rate not hostile to them, and the Kenites, the fellow-tribesmen of Caleb and Othniel, were

their most faithful friends. On the other hand they cordially hated the Egyptians, and the Canaanites were the nation from whom they had most to fear ; but neither of these peoples is so much as mentioned in the legend. Again, the contemporaries of Moses had probably never heard of the Assyrians (Ashur), or at any rate had nothing to do with them ; and the prediction that ships from the West would come and subdue this people would have entirely failed to move them, instead of forming, as it now does, a striking conclusion to Balaam's utterances, and setting the crown upon all his predictions.

Moreover, the writer treats with obvious neglect two considerations to which a poet need not be too strictly held, but which are quite inexorable in actual life—the considerations of time and space. When we are told of the embassy that spent the night with Balaam and then returned without accomplishing anything, and of the second which immediately followed the first, and with which Balaam set out the very day after its arrival, we should certainly never imagine that the journey in question was surrounded with difficulties, led through the desert and occupied at least fourteen days each way ! Are we to suppose that the Israelites waited in the plains of Moab, with their hands folded, to see what would come of Balak's machinations ?

Nor is this all. Nothing could be more striking than the growing intensity of Balaam's inspiration. Both style and contents of his oracles grow more and more glowing and exalted to the end.—But Balak took him to three positions successively, each of which commanded a different view of the great Israelitish camp. They must, therefore, have been situated a good way apart ; and since Balaam had seven altars built for sacrifice upon each of them, and twice consulted the signs of heaven as well, the whole thing must have occupied several days rather than a few hours. But if

the seer's inspiration had so long to cool after each successive utterance, his steady increase of enthusiasm becomes absolutely inexplicable.

Rightly to understand the legend of Balaam, and to do justice to the writer's meaning, we must think how Israel was situated under Jeroboam II. This monarch ruled from Syria to the borders of Egypt; for if Judah was not absolutely incorporated into his kingdom, it was nevertheless completely dependent upon him. Israel was more numerous, powerful, and prosperous than it had been for ages. For this it had to thank its god, Yahweh, who dwelt in its midst, and to whose power and grace it was a living witness. The brightest hopes for the future were therefore justified. Even the Assyrians, of whose dread might the Israelites had only heard the terrible report as yet, even the Assyrians would have no power to injure Yahweh's people; but, on the contrary, would bring it blessings, as we shall shortly see. We must note that our writer was certainly a Judæan, for he never troubles himself about the affairs of the North, while he enters in detail upon those of Judah. This Judæan, then, perceived a few weak points in his own neighbourhood: There were the Moabites, who had retained their independence ever since the death of Ahab, and now hung threateningly upon the Transjordanic territory of Israel; there were the Edomites, who had not been subdued even by the defeat which Amaziah had inflicted on them, and who were ceaselessly watching their chance of a fierce revenge; and there were the Kenites, who dwelt in southern Judah, and were always ready to take sides with the people's foes, especially with Edom. In short, the outlying districts to the South, though overawed by Jeroboam's might, and by his possession of the strong position of Elath, were by no means well disposed to Israel. Our writer even despaired of an Israelitish monarch ever having power to conquer all these enemies. Moab he might subdue, but

Edom never; and, as for driving the Kenites from their inaccessible mountain holds, that task must be reserved for Ashur! For Ashur? But would there be no danger in that case of Isaael's also falling under his dread yoke? Yes! but what danger was too great for Yahweh to avert? There were mighty peoples in the West as well as in the East.—The table of nations in Genesis proves that the Israelites were acquainted with certain Grecian races, for instance.¹—From "the islands," then, or from Cyprus, "Japhet's sons," would come to help the people of Yahweh; and Ashur, too, after having served the god of Israel, as an instrument in chastising his foes, would in his turn be rendered harmless.

To glorify Israel, and its god Yahweh, this legend dwells upon the utter impossibility of even the bitterest foes of the people calling down a curse upon it and destroying it. No real prophet, to whom God in truth reveals himself, can pronounce anything but a blessing upon Israel.

And such a prophet Balaam was. Since he appears in our story as a wizard, and since all kinds of witchcraft were forbidden with ever increasing severity by the laws of Israel, it is not surprising that the Jews after the Captivity had no great liking for him. Again, when the monuments of Israel's history were collected, our legend was immediately followed by an account of the people's apostasy in joining in the worship of Baal-Peor, and it seemed very obvious to bring the two stories into connection with each other. The germ of this idea may be traced in a couple of passages in the Old Testament itself, where it is said that the sin of the Israelites was the consequence of Balaam's oracle, and that he himself was killed amongst the Midianites, with whom he was staying.²

¹ Genesis x. 2—5.

² Joshua xiii. 22, and Numbers xxxi. 16, where we must read *in accordance with the oracle of Balaam* instead of *through the counsel of Balaam*.

Josephus makes the tale complete and says that, before Balaam returned from Moab, he advised Balak to undo the Israelites by tempting them to take part in the licentious worship of Baal-Peor; as if the prince of the Moabites himself would have recognised the baneful character of his own religion! The conception of Balaam as a deceiver, a false prophet bribed by Balak, a typical enemy of the kingdom of God, became more and more firmly established amongst the Jews, and was current likewise amongst the Christians of the first centuries.¹

Nothing could be further from the intention of the legend itself, however, which is admirably reflected by the prophet Micah.² "Consider, my people, the plots of Balak against you, and Balaam's answer to him." Balaam, who repeats the words of Yahweh, is a true prophet of that deity. The story does not indeed give him the name of prophet, but he describes himself in terms which minutely correspond to the character.³ It is true that he practises magic, which is forbidden on pain of death by ancient and more recent laws of Israel as heathenish,⁴ but it is undeniable, again, that prophets of Yahweh often acted as soothsayers and wizards before the Captivity, and are even described by these names;⁵ so that it was really impossible to draw the line between a prophet and a soothsayer.

Balaam, the great magician, whose word was a word of God, was entreated by Israel's foe to curse the people of Yahweh. Balak sought to buy his help with sordid gold. The seer was not indisposed to serve him, for the great reward was tempting. But though he wished to utter a curse on Israel, he dare do nothing against his god's command; and

¹ Revelation ii. 14; 2 Peter ii. 15, 16.

² Micah vi. 5.

³ Numbers xxiv. 3, 4, 15, 16.

⁴ Exodus xxii. 18; Deuteronomy xviii. 10, 11; Leviticus xix. 26, 31, xx. 6, 27.

⁵ Micah iii. 5, 7, 11; Isaiah iii. 2; Jeremiah xxix. 8.

his god gave heed to neither Balak's nor the prophet's wish.¹ First he forbade the seer to go to Moab at all, and then, when he let him go, sternly admonished him to speak no word but what he laid upon his lips. Once more this lesson was impressed upon the man of God when the angel, with drawn sword, cried threateningly, "Who acts against my will, acts at his peril!" Balaam, accordingly, never wavered in his choice, and faithfully repeated Yahweh's revelations. He was willing to comply with Balak's wish, and try again and yet again if Yahweh's will were changed; but on each occasion he felt more deeply that no such change could be, poured out his words of blessing with greater warmth, and was at last so completely penetrated with the spirit of his god, and saw so clearly that Yahweh had blessings only in store for Israel, that he rejected as superfluous all his magic arts, and even volunteered, unasked, to reveal the people's future, and fill the measure of Balak's consternation!

So unconditionally was Israel the beloved of Yahweh, so unconditionally defended and blessed by this Most High, this Mighty One! And such, again, is the power of God in hearts that feel his presence!

This is the real religious thought that lies at the kernel of the story. It is a consecrating and consoling truth that raises up our lives! Our wishes are often opposed to the will of God. It is often against our interest to listen to the voice of truth. But it is too strong for us, and compels us to forget our own advantage and honour, and to say and do what God bids us.

Happy are we if our lives exemplify this power of God!

¹ Deuteronomy xxiii. 4, 5; Joshua xxiv. 9, 10.

CHAPTER XIX.

AMOS AND THE PROPHETS BY PROFESSION.

AMOS VII.; NUMBERS XI.

IN the mountain land of Judah, a few leagues south of Bethlehem, lay the city of Tekoa. To the east stretched the barren plains known as "the desert," which furnished scanty pastures but were unfit for cultivation. Tekoa itself, however, was a busy place, for it was the scene of an active trade between the Egyptian merchants and the Israelites, and was especially famed for its great horse fairs.¹ For these reasons Rehoboam had fortified the place.²

Now in the neighbourhood of Tekoa, towards the end of the reign of Jeroboam II., there lived a herdsman of the name of Amos. He was so poor that he was often glad to make a meal on the fruit of the wild fig trees, but he was a man of no little culture and information. The book that bears his name contains a short epitome of his prophecies and an account of his experiences at Bethel; and since he is himself its author, it shows that he could not only speak when the inspiration was on him, but also write; or at any rate, even if he dictated the book to some one else, could calmly recall his utterances and reproduce them in a regular form. It appears, moreover, from the contents of the book itself, that he was well acquainted not only with what was going on in his own time in Palestine and in the surrounding countries, but also with the previous history of his people.³ But he is chiefly distinguished by the depth of his religious feeling and his extreme reverence for Yahweh, upon whose will he held that everything depended. "Behold!" he cried,⁴ "He who forms the mountains and creates the wind, who

¹ Compare p. 93.² 2 Chronicles xi. 6.³ See Amos i., ii., v. 25, 26, vi. 2, ix. 7.⁴ Amos iv. 13.

declares his thoughts to man; he who turns twilight into darkness and steps on the heights of the earth,—Yahweh, god of hosts, is his name!" and elsewhere:¹ "He who makes the seven stars and Orion, who changes thick darkness to morning dawn and darkens the day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out over the earth,—Yahweh is his name!" Both blessings and disasters come from him,² and vain is the attempt to flee from him! The prophet cherished the conviction afterwards expressed by a poet in the words:³

O Yahweh, thou dost search me and know me,
 Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising;
 Thou perceivest my thoughts afar off.
 Thou judgest my walking and my lying down,
 And art acquainted with all my ways.
 For before there is even a word on my tongue
 Lo! thou knowest all, O Yahweh!
 Thou encompassest me behind and before,
 And dost stretch out thine hand over me.
 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
 So high that I comprehend it not!
 Whither shall I go where thy breath is not felt?
 Whither shall I flee from thy presence?
 If I ascend into heaven, thou art there;
 If I make my bed in the land of shadows, behold!
 thou art there.
 Though I sat on the wings of the dawn,
 Though I dwelt where the sea meets the sky,
 Even there thy hand would lead me
 And thy right hand would hold me.
 Should I say: Surely the darkness will cover me,
 Even the night would be light about me,

¹ Amos v. 8, ix. 6. ² Amos ix. 13, 14, iv. 6—11, vi. 14, viii. 8, 9.

³ Psalm cxxxix. 1—14; Amos ix. 2—4.

Not even the darkness hides from thee,
 But the night shines as the day;
 The darkness as the light.
 Thou hast made my inmost parts,
 Hast formed me in my mother's womb.
 I will praise thee, for I am so wondrously made !
 Marvellous are thy works !
 My soul knows it right well.

To the deepest reverence for this omniscient and mighty god, Amos joined a profound sense of his holiness and retributive justice. "He who has chosen Israel out of all the nations of the earth, will requite Israel's sins with double rigour. As surely as two men cannot walk together unless they meet; as surely as a lion never roars unless he has found his prey, and a bird never falls into a snare unless a snare has been set for him; as surely as the people tremble when the trumpet's blast is heard, so surely will disaster never fall upon a city except by Yahweh's will."¹

But, for this very reason, Amos foresaw all manner of misery for his people; for much had come to his ears that stirred his intensest indignation. In his own neighbourhood the worship of Beersheba flourished;² and in the northern kingdom there were the shrines at Gilgal, Bethel, and Dan;³ all of them sheer godlessness ! "From Sion Yahweh roars, and lifts up his voice from Jerusalem."⁴ But no sacrifice or festival, no song of praise or sound of temple music could appease him. He hated the holy days of a sinful people. Rather "let Israel's justice rush down like a torrent; his righteousness like a dashing river."⁵ Cruelty and impiety were the special sins that Amos abhorred, and it was therefore more especially northern Israel that stirred his wrath.

¹ Amos iii. 1-6.

² Amos v. 5, viii. 14. Compare Vol. I. pp. 212-214.

³ Amos iii. 14, iv. 4, v. 5, viii. 14. ⁴ Amos i. 2. ⁵ Amos v. 21-24.

Doubtless, all the surrounding countries had merited the chastisement of Yahweh by their savage cruelty, but his wrath would burn most hotly against Israel. Judah is only once or twice reproved by Amos, and then in the most general terms.¹ But as for Israel, what horrors were not perpetrated there! There the devout were sold as slaves because they could not pay their debts, though may be it was but the poor price of a pair of shoes they owed! There the usurer cast hungry eyes upon the very dust which the poor wretch he had stripped of everything had cast in his agony upon his head!—might not even that be worth something? There father and son practised lasciviousness together! There rich tyrants stretched themselves by the altars upon the clothes they had received in pledge,² and held drinking bouts in their temples with the money they had extorted as fines by unjust sentences!³ By the great blessing of Yahweh some of their sons might grow to be prophets and others nazirites. Yet they strove to force the nazirites to break their vow of abstinence from wine, and would not suffer the prophets to preach the word of Yahweh!⁴ Samaria's palaces were full of treasure, so were her winter and summer residences and her ivory villas; but knavery and usury had drawn the wealth together.⁵ These men conceived themselves to be religious, yet when the feast of New Moon or sabbath came they longed for the time of rest to pass that they might once more push their trade with their false weights and measures, and suck the marrow of the poor to their hearts' content.⁶

When Amos pondered on the sins of Israel his soul was in a turmoil of indignant grief, and at last he could bear it no longer, and determined to preach the word of Yahweh to

¹ Amos ii. 4, 5, vi. 1.

² Compare Exodus xxii. 25—27.

³ Amos ii. 6—8, v. 11, 12.

⁴ Amos ii. 11, 12.

⁵ Amos iii. 10, 15.

⁶ Amos viii. 4—6.

the wanton drunkards "who walked securely upon Sion, and carelessly on the hills of Samaria."¹ He felt that his god called him, and as he himself exclaims, "When the lion roars who does not tremble? When the lord Yahweh speaks who can but prophecy?" Yahweh revealed to his servants the prophets the things that were to come.²

So Amos set out for Bethel, in the kingdom of Jeroboam, where the royal chapel stood. There he lifted his prophetic voice and cried woe upon the proud and careless people who ascribed its power to the might of its own hands!³ "Seek Yahweh," he cried, "that you may rescue your lives; for not till you do good and cease from evil will Yahweh, the god of war-hosts, upon whose help you trust, be with you indeed. Then he will be gracious at least to a remnant of Joseph. For woe shall come upon you, and wailing for the dead shall be heard in every street; the dirge, 'Alas! my brother!' shall rise on every side. The husbandman shall be called home suddenly to wail the dead; and the mourners shall be sent for everywhere.—Do you call for the day of Yahweh? Ah! fools. What will it bring you? Darkness and not light. It will be as if a man fled from a lion and fell into the jaws of a bear, or fled into a house and leaned against the wall and was bitten by a serpent. So shall the day of Yahweh be pitch dark as night, unbroken by a ray of light!"⁴ "Behold, a strange people falls upon you [the prophet means the Assyrians] and oppresses you from Hamath to the borders of Egypt."⁵

Such was the constant burden of the prophet's utterances at Bethel. On one occasion⁶ he thus described the fearful gloom of Israel's future: "The lord Yahweh sent me a vision;

¹ Amos vi. 1, 4—5; compare p. 81.

² Amos vi. 13.

³ Amos v. 14—20.

⁴ Amos vii. 1 ff.

⁵ Amos iii. 7, 8.

⁶ Amos vi. 14.

and behold, there came up swarms of locusts about the time of after-grass. They had devoured almost everything when I cried imploringly, 'Lord Yahweh, spare ! What is there left of Jacob ? Alas ! he is so small.'—So Yahweh spared the rest. But then he called the fire to fight against Israel, and behold, the heat had consumed the great deep and a part of the land also when I cried imploringly, 'Lord Yahweh, cease ! What is there left of Jacob ? Alas ! he is so small !'—Once more Yahweh was appeased and spared the rest. But soon I saw him again. This time he stood upon a wall, built true, with a plumb-line in his hand.—'What see you, Amos ?' he cried to me.—'A plumb-line,' I replied.—'See !' he went on, 'I will measure a piece for destruction out of the midst of Israel with this line ; and this time I will not spare it. Isaac's *bamahs* shall be levelled with the ground, Israel's sanctuaries destroyed, and I will rise up with the sword against Jeroboam's house !'

These dread oracles came to the ear of Amaziah, Yahweh's chief priest at Bethel, and he saw that some check must be imposed upon the prophet's hardy sayings. So he told the king how Amos had foretold his death by violence, and the captivity and transportation of the people. Such seditious language, he added, could not but work mischief. Not daring to lay hands on Yahweh's messenger, he goaded him with scornful language, and strove to rob him of the people's respect and so compel him to take his departure. "Seer !" he sneered, "take yourself off to your own country, and eat your bread in peace, and prophesy there to your heart's content ! But here in Bethel we will have no more of you, for it is the royal shrine and a temple of the kingdom." But Amos answered haughtily, "I am no prophet by profession, nor am I of the sons of the prophets. I was but a herdsman, living upon wild figs. But Yahweh has taken me from following my flocks, and bidden me go pro-

phesy against his people Israel. And now hear Yahweh's word: Inasmuch as you forbid me to declare God's word to the house of Isaac, your wife shall be a prey to the enemy, your children shall fall by the sword, your land shall be divided, and you yourself shall die in an unclean land, for Israel shall surely be carried away out of his own land into captivity."

Amos foresaw disaster, foresaw the captivity of Israel; but he was none the less deeply convinced of the glorious destiny of Yahweh's imperishable people. So when he committed the substance of his prophecies to writing, he concluded all his denunciations with these words:¹ "I will destroy this godless kingdom, yet I will not utterly root out the house of Jacob. Rather will I sift it, as with a winnowing fan, when it is scattered amongst all peoples, and not the least grain shall be lost. But all the sinners amongst my people shall perish by the sword—all they that arrogantly cry, 'The evil will not come near us!' In that day I will raise up the fallen tent of David, hedge round its gaps, heal its breaches, and restore it to its ancient glory. Then shall they take possession of the remnant of Edom, and of all the peoples who once were Yahweh's subjects. Thus says Yahweh, and thus will he bring to pass: Behold the days come when the reaper shall put in his sickle while the ploughman is still at work, and ere seed-time be over the grapes shall be ripe for treading; when the mountains shall drop new wine and all the hills flow down. Then will I bring back the children of my people who have been taken away captive, to rebuild the wasted cities, to replant the vineyards and drink the wine they yield, to lay out gardens and eat the fruit that grows there. I will plant them in their land, and never more pluck them up! Thus says Yahweh, your god."

¹ Amos ix. 8—15.

Not the least interesting point in the history of Amos is the contempt with which the chief priest at Bethel addresses him as "seer!" and the emphasis with which he himself rejects the title of prophet, or son of a prophet, that is, member of a prophetic school. These things would seem to indicate that Yahweh's messengers were held in no great honour. The circumstance demands our attention all the more urgently because it stands by no means alone. There are other men of God, whose writings we possess, who denounce in the strongest language not this or that seer only, but the prophets in general. We must not lay too much stress upon Amaziah's language, however, for it is common enough for a man who looks with the utmost reverence and awe upon his special "clergy,"—whether he call them priests, magicians, parsons, or ministers—nay, who is ready to become their absolute slave, if need be, yet to burst into the most violent invectives against the whole order when one of their number happens to offend him! Amaziah was angry with Amos, and his calling him a "seer" in a tone of contempt by no means proves that the prophets were not generally respected in Israel. But it may be urged that Amos himself objected to being called a prophet. Was it looked upon as a term of disgrace? That does not follow. It is natural for a man to reject a name that is given him in contempt, even if there is nothing dishonourable in the name itself. But since, as we have said, this passage does not stand alone, since we frequently meet with the most violent denunciations of the prophets, we are compelled to look more closely into the condition of the prophetic communities, and are prepared to find that there was much room for improvement in them.

In discussing Samuel's work we said a few words on the prophetic schools.¹ What was then brought forward,

¹ Vol. II. pp. 279, 280.

together with the incidental information we have gleaned from time to time,¹ constitutes the whole of our knowledge of these institutions. We have only to recall the names of Ahijah, Elijah, and Elisha to realise the power which the prophets and their disciples often wielded over the sentiments of the people, and the way in which they deposed one king and set another upon the throne! It was they who kept the people in comparative independence under their monarchs, and prevented Israel from becoming a nation of slaves. It was they who rooted out the worship of Baal, and maintained and developed the principles of Moses. In the eighth century they were also prominent as authors and national historians; and it was to them that Israel owed its deep sense of dignity and its lofty conception of Yahweh's nature. As far as we can tell the spiritual life of the people was drawn to a focus in the schools of the prophets, under the guidance of their "fathers."

Now, we have not the smallest reason to suppose that the members of these prophetic schools grew degenerate in later times, and yet the very nature of the institutions exposed them to many evils. A prophet was supposed by himself and others to interpret the will of the deity, and no one really does so unless his own reflection and the intensity of his own moral life have raised him to a higher religious level than that of others, and have thus enabled him to become the teacher of those around him and the herald of a better day. Now such men must always be few, must generally stand alone, and a whole community of such messengers of God is simply inconceivable. But the Israelites imagined that there might be hundreds and thousands of these interpreters of Yahweh, and this delusion caused an isolated burst of religious enthusiasm to form a sufficient passport for any man into the ranks of the "inspired," and must from the very

¹ Vol. II. p. 350; Vol. III. pp. 131 ff, 150-162, &c., &c.

first have exercised a baneful influence upon the moral tone of the prophets.

Consider what their vocation involved ! In the first place, they were regarded by the superstitious multitude as soothsayers, men who could foresee the future, and might therefore be consulted as to the issue of a sickness, or at the outset of any important enterprise, such as a great mercantile voyage, a campaign, or the conclusion of a peace. They themselves, too, accepted the character of soothsayers, for they were firmly convinced that they really had power to foretell the future. Closely connected with this office was the more especial task of the prophets in exhorting, consoling, and encouraging their people, for in prosperity and adversity they traced the hand of God rewarding virtue and chastising wickedness. Thus they became the preachers of righteousness and the leaders of public opinion, for Yahweh never did anything without first revealing it to his servants the prophets.¹

To what temptations must a man have been exposed who regarded himself, and was regarded by others, as God's interpreter ! Nothing short of the constant inspiration of sacred zeal and the intensest moral earnestness could preserve a man once placed on such a pedestal from pride and insincerity. To chastise or comfort others in the name of God is a glorious task which bears the richest fruit for him who undertakes it, and for others too, but only on condition that he is really called to it ; for he who preaches the word of God simply because it is his official duty to do so cannot be true either to himself or others, and is sure to degenerate into a spiritual quacksalver. This is the standing danger of everyone whose social calling requires him to do work which can only be done well when he himself is in the right mood for doing it. Nor did the prophets escape the danger. They

¹ Amos iii. 7.

were Yahweh's interpreters, "men of the spirit"—by profession ! When we reflect how rare great men must be in any body, we shall understand that while some of the sons of the prophets were the true light of their age, the true "chariots and horsemen of Israel," while others were unprincipled hypocrites who had oracles ready for the taste of anyone who would pay for them, the majority were simply commonplace and shallow, and as far as possible from possessing that jewel—rare at all times—an independent conviction of their own ! A fit of enthusiasm might have first led them to join the ranks of the prophets, but it soon yielded to the dull routine of custom. If even an Elisha was sometimes forced to call in the aid of music before the spirit of Yahweh would seize him, how often must inferior men have stirred themselves to the prophetic rapture by this stimulus, or the less innocent one of wine, for instance ! The prophetic style was gradually acquired until "Thus says Yahweh" might preface the thoughtless repetition of another's words, or the chance dictates of the impulse of the moment.

Public opinion has tremendous force, and is often identified with truth itself, witness the proverb *vox populi vox dei*, 'the voice of the people is the voice of God ;' nor were the interpreters of Yahweh exempt from its influence any more than others. In fact, they often followed it passively when they should have independently controlled it. When the people were in a downcast mood, most of the prophets were gloomy also, and had no revelations ; but if a victory was gained, or if any other circumstance gave the people courage, then the prophets raised a song of triumph. Like the mass of men, they were dazzled by the glittering shows of royalty, for instance, or the pomp of war, and depressed by famine or defeat. Under Jehu and Jehoahaz, when Israel was oppressed by the Syrians, few men of God would utter words of cheer, and Elisha would be almost alone in his task of

comforter; but under Jeroboam II. the whole chorus of prophets would swell the cry: "Hail to the people of Israel, whom Yahweh makes victorious!"

Most men, of course, failed to perceive these shortcomings of the prophets, or bowed before the interpreters of Yahweh in spite of them. But there were a few who really knew by their own experience what it meant to be called by God, and whether they were sons of the prophets themselves or had never been received into their communities, in any case they stood far enough above their surroundings to perceive with shame and sorrow the superficial thoughtlessness of the mass of prophets. And since these men of loftier spirit could not understand the sincerity of the other prophets in proclaiming that as truth the precise opposite of which they themselves recognised as the word of Yahweh, they took the rough and ready method of denouncing them as liars, as false prophets who uttered their own fancies in the name of God or upon whom a lying spirit had descended. We have already met with one example in Micaiah the son of Imlah and Ahab's four hundred prophets,¹ and shall come upon many other instances in the sequel of the history.

The mass of prophets, whose oracles followed rather than led public opinion, naturally looked down with contempt and aversion upon the few who stood alone, and professed to see farther than any of them, especially if they were not recognised members of the order; just in the same way as regular clergy are often apt to speak slightly of "preachers." But those whose sight was keener perceived that a man might be called by Yahweh though he had never been received into the official circle of prophets.

This thought is forcibly expressed in a remarkable story in the Pentateuch,² which professes to place us in the period

¹ See pp. 157 ff.

² Numbers xi.

of Israel's wanderings in the desert, but really gives us the conceptions of a later age.

Once, when the Israelites were full of discontent, and uttered the bitterest complaints in Yahweh's hearing, he made a fire burst out at the edge of the camp, and the people were so terrified that they implored Moses to intercede for them; and at his prayer the fire was quenched. So they called this place Taberah, that is *conflagration*. Some time afterwards the rabble of foreign camp-followers began to long for flesh to eat, and the sons of Israel themselves were led away by them. They thought repiningly of the fruit and fish of Egypt, and complained that the manna was insipid. When Moses heard the people murmuring in this fashion all through the camp he was very angry, and dreaded the most fatal consequences. Seeking refuge with Yahweh he prayed, "O Yahweh, why hast thou afflicted me thus? Thou hast laid the burden of all this people upon me. Am I their father or their mother that I should have to bring them to the land which thou didst promise to their fathers, as a nurse would carry a sucking child? How can I find flesh to appease their longing? I cannot bear the charge of all this multitude. It is too hard for me. If thou requirest it of me then should I hold it a mercy to be slain by thee, and so to see my misery no more!"

Upon this Yahweh commanded him to call together seventy elders, whom he knew, at the tent of meeting, and to keep them near him. He was also to command the people to sanctify themselves as a preparation for meeting Yahweh; for, from the morrow onwards, they would have flesh to eat, not for a single day or a few days only, but for a whole month, till at last they would grow sick of it. Moses was not a little amazed at this, for there were six hundred thousand men in the camp, and he could not imagine where meat was to come from to satisfy them all; but Yahweh asked

him whether he supposed his power was not equal to the task, and Moses did as he was commanded.

Now, when he had chosen seventy of Israel's elders and ranged them round the tent, Yahweh came down in the cloud, spoke to them, and gave them some of his spirit, which he took from Moses. Then they prophesied, as long as the spirit rested on them, but no longer. Meanwhile two of the men whom Moses had chosen, namely Eldad and Medad, had not come to the tent with the rest, but had stayed behind in the camp. But the spirit rested upon them too, and they prophesied in the camp. When this was told to Moses his servant, Joshua, exclaimed: "Lord Moses, forbid them!" But Moses answered: "Are you jealous for my honour? Oh! that Yahweh would make all his people prophets, and give his spirit to them all!"

Accompanied by the elders, Moses now returned to the camp, and lo! a west wind bore flocks of quails over the camp until they lay heaped up two cubits high upon the ground all round the camp, a day's journey in every direction! The people picked them up in unheard of numbers; but, while they were still eating, Yahweh's wrath burst out, and he made a great slaughter amongst them. So they called the place Kibroth-Hattaavah, that is, *graves of desire*.

Several elements of this story reappear in other legends, and are already familiar to us; but our special attention is now claimed by the description of the elders who are to support Moses, and of Eldad and Medad. These seventy elders obviously represent the prophets, who were very justly regarded as the fellow-labourers of Moses and the continuers of his work. The legend therefore insists upon the special characteristics of the prophets—namely, that as long as the spirit of Yahweh rested on them they were inspired, but no longer. Moses might see Yahweh, face to face, with unveiled

clearness, at all times,¹ but in this privilege he stood alone ; others saw Yahweh only for a time, in visions and in dreams. If the seventy elders are taken as representing the prophets, then Eldad and Medad can hardly stand for anything else than such messengers of God as Amos, who had never passed through the prophetic schools. It is instructive to observe the light in which our author regards them. He holds them to be genuine prophets, for they are amongst the seventy whom Moses chose, and have a share of Yahweh's spirit. It was narrow-minded to endeavour to close their mouths. Such efforts sprang from a misdirected zeal for Moses, as if no one had a right to speak except under his eye and according to his rules. But the true course was to leave them undisturbed. Their reasons for not joining the rest were unexplained and their conduct was contrary to rule, but still they must be allowed to speak out freely. It would be well if there were more such men, inspired by Yahweh's spirit ; for to rule such a fretful and capricious people, so easily led astray, was a task that would strain the powers of many, many prophets.

The author of this legend had a truly liberal and generous heart, uncramped by party spirit and free from paltry self-exaltation. He would encourage not only recognised prophets, but all who had the spirit of Yahweh, to speak out.

And the same freedom appears to have been demanded by the public opinion of the Israelites. Is it not remarkable that the chief priest Amaziah, however much exasperated against Amos, offers him no violence ? He does not appear to have done so even when he discovered that the bold intruder was not so much as a disciple of one of the prophetic schools. Though almost all the messengers of Yahweh had passed through one of these institutions and were members of the prophetic societies, yet a word spoken in Yahweh's name

¹ Numbers xii. 6-8. Compare Vol. II., pp. 72 ff.

was enough in itself to secure respect entirely apart from any such connection. Every prophet of Yahweh, whatever his antecedents, was free to utter what his god revealed to him.

We may well go still further than the writer of our legend, and recognise in the free preachers of the word, like Amos, who were no prophets by profession but had been seized by Yahweh's spirit, a power, a freshness, a courage, a love of truth and an earnestness of purpose which the sons of the prophets but too often lacked.

In the following chapter we shall discuss the chief point in which the preaching of such men as these differed from that of the ordinary prophets.

CHAPTER XX.

THE PROPHET HOSEA.

HOSEA XI, I-III.

WHAT distinguished Amos from most of the prophets of his day was not his conception of Yahweh's nature, or his relation to Israel. All the prophets alike were convinced that Yahweh was the god of gods, if not the only God, and that Israel was his people and could therefore never perish. "Hail to thee, Israel, thou people whom Yahweh crowns with victory!" was a cry which found an echo in all their hearts. What distinguished Amos from the others was the zeal with which he maintained the moral requirements of Yahweh. The comparative absence of any sense of guilt in the great mass of the prophets is very remarkable. For Israel, the mighty people of Yahweh, they had hardly anything but congratulations, blessings, and auspicious prophecies. Other nations worshipped idols, but Israel served the true god; and surely he, the Almighty, would protect his servants. To

doubt it was impossible!—Read all the stories of the ancient times which were written in this eighth century, and you will hardly ever find the recognition of any sin in Israel. Even such a picture as that of the people murmuring in the desert is not intended, in the first instance, to warn the writer's contemporaries against ingratitude and discontent, but to throw a more brilliant light on the power of Yahweh in helping his beloved ones.¹ Elijah did indeed announce the judgment of Yahweh, but Micaiah stood alone in opposing his four hundred colleagues; and when the worship of Baal was rooted out the prophets seem to have found nothing more to condemn, and Elisha could content himself with comforting his people and teaching them to trust in Yahweh's might. Amos, on the other hand, saw deeper. To his mind Israel was far too sinful to be unconditionally blessed. It was impossible that Yahweh should have in store for such a people blessings only, for he would sternly maintain his moral ordinances. A land on which there were so many stains, in which so much injustice went unchecked, in which the godless and licentious nobles oppressed the poor and perverted justice merely to find means of carousing, in which there was so much in chastity and so much knavery, such a land had nothing to expect in the immediate future but misery. Woe to Israel and Israel's king!

Men of deep moral nature, grieving to see how far their people fall short of the ideal standard, till at last their zeal breaks forth and compels them to take up arms against the sins of their age, are at all times rare; but Amos had a spiritual brother in Hosea, concerning whom we will now give some particulars.

Of his outward life we only know that his father's name was Beeri, while his writings seem to indicate that he was a native of northern Israel. The superscription of his book

¹ Compare Vol. II., p. 66.

says that he prophesied under Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, as well as under Jeroboam II.; but this is incorrect. At any rate, none of the oracles which we still possess bring us further down than a few years after Jeroboam's death.

The greater portion of Hosea's book (chapters iv.—xiv.) resembles that of Amos, in being an abstract of the prophet's discourses, composed by himself. Many passages are exceedingly difficult to understand, owing to the allusions they contain to circumstances of which we have no knowledge, the broken sentences of which they are often composed, and the absence of any regular line of development. All this is what we should expect from a man who gives us a short review of what he has said on different occasions in times past, under circumstances many of which have widely altered.

But though the exact meaning of many a passage is lost, we can still see clearly enough the spirit of the whole. Hosea is so full of tender love for his people that its fate overwhelms him with sadness. Immorality stirs his intensest indignation,¹ and his faith in Yahweh's love for Israel never wavers. He is therefore deeply convinced that though the land will be chastised for its sins, it will at last be restored to honour. He was a passionate opponent of the bull-worship to which he constantly refers,² whereas Amos never mentions it in express terms; and he attributes the disasters of his people in great measure to the priests, whom he never spares. He was all the less tolerant of their shortcomings because he held in such slight esteem the sacrifices upon the performance of which they insisted and by which they lived. "Yahweh desires piety more than sacrifices, and the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings," he cried.³ He

¹ See Hosea iv. 1—3, for instance.

² Hosea viii. 4, 5, 6, x. 5, 15, xiii. 2.

³ Hosea vi. 6.

calls Moses a prophet,¹ and describes the men of God as the executors of Yahweh's judgments, for he had "chastised Israel by the prophets, slain them by his words;"² but elsewhere he appears to have but a poor opinion of them.³ The inconsistency, however, is only apparent. Hosea's thorough familiarity with the legends that were committed to writing in the prophetic schools⁴ seems to indicate that he had himself been an inmate of one of them, and in that case he may well have had the greatest reverence for the calling of a true interpreter of God's will, while by no means conscious of any respectful sympathy with the majority of his colleagues.

Here is a specimen of his preaching :—

"When Israel was yet a child I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.⁵ But when they were called they turned away; they sacrificed to Baals and burned incense to images. Yet it was I who taught them to walk, and held them under their arms; but they knew not that it was I who healed them. I drew them on with cords, with gentle bands, not as a beast is treated, but as a man. As a kind-hearted husbandman takes the yoke from his ox's neck and then gives it food, so did I deal with Israel. Truly⁶ he shall go back to Egypt and Ashur shall be his king, because they refuse to repent. The sword shall abide in his cities, shall consume and devour his gates, because of their evil designs. For my people are bent on⁷ rebelling against me. They are called on high, but not one of them directs his eyes thither."

"Yet how can I give up thee, O Ephraim, into the enemy's hands? How can I surrender thee, O Israel? How can I suffer thee to meet the fate of Admah? and make thee like Zeboim?⁷ My heart trembles at the thought; my pity grows

¹ Hosea xiii. 14.

² Hosea vi. 5.

³ Hosea ix. 7, 8.

⁴ Hosea vi. 7, ix. 10, xi. 8, xii. 4, 5, 13, xiii. 10.

⁵ Compare Exodus iv. 22.

⁶ After an amended version. Compare Hosea viii. 13, ix. 3, xi. 11.

⁷ Compare Genesis xiv. 2, xix. 24.

hot within me. I cannot pour out all my wrath upon thee ; I will not turn to destroy Ephraim ; for I am a god and not a man ; as the holy one am I in your midst, and shall enter into none of your cities.¹ But they will follow Yahweh when he comes to judgment roaring like a lion ; for he will roar, and then his sons will come in terror from the West, come like a timid bird from Egypt, like a dove from Assyria, and I will make them dwell in their homes. So says Yahweh !"

What tenderness breathes through all this passage ! Israel is an apostate people and Yahweh has good cause for wrath, but yet he loves them so !

The first three chapters of Hosea's book present the same thought in a very extraordinary form. It almost appears as if the prophet were here giving the general conclusion of his oracles. Slightly abbreviated and with a few verses transposed to suit the context, the passage runs as follows :—

When Yahweh first revealed himself to Hosea, he said : "Marry an adulterous woman, of whose children you will not be the father. For in truth Israel is faithless to her husband, Yahweh." So I obeyed the command of my god and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, to wife ; and the first son she bore I called Jezreel, at Yahweh's command ; for he would soon exact from Jehu's house requital for the blood poured out in Jezreel. Nay, he would put an end to Israel's monarchy, and break his bow in the valley of Jezreel. Then Gomer bore a daughter, and Yahweh said to me : "Call the child Unfavoured, for I will show favour to Israel no more in forgiving his sins. Yet Judah will I pity and deliver, though not by force of arms, but by Yahweh his god." And when Unfavoured was weaned, Gomer bore another son, and Yahweh commanded me and said : "Call him Not-my-people, for you are not my people, and I am not your god."

¹ Compare Exodus xxxiii. 3, 5.

And yet, one day the number of the sons of Israel shall be countless and untold as the sand on the sea shore, and in place of Not-my-people you shall be called sons of the living God. For in that day the Judæans, with the Israelites their brothers, shall leave their land, under one ruler, because it has grown too small for them; for blessed in its results shall the day of Jezreel be in which Israel's might is quenched and an end is put to the severance. So call your brothers My-people and call your sisters Favoured.

Contend with your mother for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband. Oh, that she would quit her adulteries! But, if she will not, I will strip her of everything, till she is naked as on the day of her birth, till I make her die of thirst in the desert. Nor will I take pity on her sons, for they are but bastards! Has not their mother been shameless in adulteries, and run after her paramours, from whom she vainly thought she had received all that she had, which I had given her—bread, water, wool, flax, oil, and drink. She acknowledged not that it was I who had given her all, even the very silver and gold that she used to make the Baal. Therefore will I plunge her into deepest woe, and make her atone for the days in which she burnt incense to the Baals. I will lead her on a path where thorns shall encompass her on every side, and a wall shall be in front of her, a path where she shall lose her way. Then, when she pursues her lovers, but overtakes them not, seeks them, but does not find, then she will say, "Let me seek my first husband again, for it was better with me then than now." And when such thoughts arise within her, then will I gently allure her to the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her there. And from thence I will give her her vineyards and the valley of Achor as a door of hope; then shall she sing as in the days of her youth, when she came up out of Egypt. On that day, says Yahweh, she shall call me "my husband," and no more

call me "my lord (Baal);" for I will take the names of the Baals far from her lips, and they shall be remembered no more. Then will I make a covenant with the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and all that creeps upon the ground, that they shall not hurt my people; bow and sword and weapon of war will I break and cast away, that Israel may dwell in safety. Then will I betroth myself to thee in faith and love, that thou mayest know Yahweh. In that day, says Yahweh, I will listen in mercy to the heavens, and they shall listen to the earth, and the earth to the corn and oil, and all of them to Jezreel (Israel). So will I shew favour to Unfavoured; and will call Not-my-people "My-people," and they shall say "My God!"

Yet, again, Yahweh said to me: "Go forth and bargain for the hand of a woman loved by her husband, but yet unfaithful to him—just as Yahweh loves the Israelites, whereas they turn to other gods." I did so; and, when I had bought her at a heavy price, I said: "Long time shalt thou sit desolate without either lover or husband, nor will I care for thee!"—for long time shall the sons of Israel remain bereft of king and prince, of sacrifice and *massebah*, of *ephod* and *teraphim*. Then after that they shall seek again for Yahweh, their god, and David, their king; and shall come at last in fear to Yahweh and his goodness.—

Just a word on the form and contents of this prophecy!

The form is certainly strange enough, yet not half so strange as the opinion of some commentators, who take it all as a description of veritable facts, and actually suppose that Hosea literally married a woman, at Yahweh's command, of whom he knew beforehand that she would constantly break her marriage vow. All this is obviously nothing but the form in which the prophet expresses the thought, "Israel is Yahweh's wife, tenderly loved by him, but faithless to him from the very beginning of their union."

We cannot be sure whether the name of the woman, Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, has a symbolical meaning, as the names of the children have. It is possible that it is the name of some very notorious courtesan of Hosea's time, whom he mercilessly exposes to infamy while rebuking the whole people.

This discourse furnishes us with a striking example of the great freedom with which the prophets used the forms of speech, "Yahweh said to me," and "Yahweh commanded me." Israel's infidelity, Yahweh's love, the certainty of a future restoration—such were the thoughts which the prophet might indeed regard as revelations from Yahweh; but when he threw them into this story of a command from his god, a marriage with a certain Gomer and the birth of three children whose names indicated the sins of the people and the consequences they involved, then he was quietly thinking out and deliberately preparing his discourse, just as a preacher does when he writes his sermon.

This example stands by no means alone. And again, we find "visions" recorded by the prophets which are invented from beginning to end. When hope and fear or any other conflicting emotions contend for victory in the heart of a man, until the strain of his over-wrought system bursts into a kind of ecstasy or frenzy and he imagines himself to hear the words of God or to see messengers from heaven who instruct him how to act or what the future will bring forth, then such a man is said to have had a "vision." As an example of what we mean we may refer to the description already given of what we suppose to have taken place in Deborah's heart before she summoned her countrymen to the battle.¹ A vision, in short, is a kind of waking dream. Now, of course, such visions must be of comparatively rare occurrence, and for the most part extremely simple. But

¹ Vol. II., p. 168.

all the prophets are called "seers," and to have visions was a recognised part of their profession. In other words, the men of God clothed what they had to say in the form of visions, and "Yahweh showed me" was a simple figure of rhetoric. Just as poets sometimes clothe their thoughts in the form of a dream, or profess to tell us what they thought or saw as they stood upon such and such a spot, though their readers never seriously suppose that they really had these dreams or saw these wondrous sights. And in the same way, when Amos, for instance, says: "Yahweh showed me swarms of locusts eating everything bare, and then a fire consuming water and land; and when these two disasters had been averted by my prayer, I saw Yahweh himself standing with a plumb-line in his hand"¹—we are not to suppose that the prophet really had any such vision, for it is simply a form of speech. This is shown by the highly artificial character of many of these visions, which in some cases owe their origin entirely to a play upon words. Take the following, for instance:² "The lord Yahweh showed me a basket of fruit (*kaitz*), and asked: Amos, what see you? I answered: A basket of *kaitz*. Whereupon he said: The end (*keetz*) of Israel is come, and I will no more spare him." This is clearly a fictitious vision. The prophet avails himself of the similarity of sound between the words signifying "end" and "fruit" thus to announce the fall of Israel.

These rhetorical expressions "Yahweh said," "Yahweh showed me," "Yahweh made me hear," "Yahweh commanded me," are in themselves as innocent as those of the poets; but they were rendered dangerous and pernicious by the fact that the prophets demanded reverence and obedience for the oracles which they prefaced with "Thus says Yahweh," as though they were the genuine utterances of their god. If even the greatest prophets, whose integrity is

¹ Amos vii. 1 ff. See p. 280.

² Amos viii. 1, 2.

above all suspicion, such as Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, employed these expressions without any hesitation, how recklessly they must have been used and abused by seers of inferior mould! There is a departure from strict veracity in these forms which could not fail to cause incalculable detriment to prophecy.

As regards the substance of Hosea's preaching, we may note a curious point of opposition to the legend of Balaam and the "blessing of Moses;" for whereas these poems, though written by Judæans, anticipate the happiest results from Jeroboam's rule, Hosea, on the other hand, though probably a native of the northern kingdom, desires the reunion of all the tribes under a prince of David's house. In this he agrees with Amos.

In another and more important point he is one with the Judæan shepherd. They are both of them dissatisfied with Israel. Neither of them is dazzled by the splendour of Jeroboam's rule; and both look forward to days of misery, not because the power of Assyria is extending and Israel is far too weak to hold his own against her, but because Yahweh will chastise Israel for his sins. Israel did not fulfil his calling. He was wicked and apostate, and Yahweh would one day punish his former worship of Baal. Both Amos and Hosea were preachers of repentance.

Hosea made a very deep impression by the image he selected to represent the relation between Israel and Yahweh. Israel was Yahweh's wife. Yahweh had married her at the time of the exodus from Egypt. He had always been good to his wife, and had given her many blessings in the land of Canaan; but Israel was faithless to him, and had served other gods. This Hosea called committing adultery with the idols; and, when the people is plunged into disaster because of its idolatry, it is like a wanton wife neglected by her husband because of her infidelity, but pursuing her para-

mours in vain. If the people gives up its idolatry, it is as though the deserted wife returned in sorrow to the husband of her youth, and was received by him again,—for Yahweh's mercy is infinite! This image, by which the tie between Yahweh and Israel was likened to marriage, was not only taken up and elaborated in several ways by later prophets,¹ but even established itself in the very language of the Israelites, in which idolatry is constantly called "lusting after the idols;" and it is sometimes difficult to make out whether it is in chastity or idolatry that is spoken of.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BRIGHT SIDE OF THE PICTURE.

PROVERBS X.—XXII. 16, XXV.—XXIX.; SONG OF SOLOMON.

WERE Hosea and Amos justified in their unfavourable judgment on Israel? Were the people really as bad as they paint them? We have seen already that these two prophets stood almost alone, and that most of their colleagues sang the praises of Israel. This does not prove that Hosea and Amos were wrong, for truth does not always lie on the side of the majority. Far from it! But it does at least prevent our accepting their unfavourable judgment off hand. Nay more, it makes us suspect that the preachers of repentance judged their people unfairly, and looked almost exclusively at the dark side of their life. For, however shallow the prophets and poets may have been who were ever singing the song, "Hail to thee, Israel, people of Yahweh!" yet they were far from having no moral perceptions! Men who were employed in serious literary labours, and who taught their

¹ See Isaiah liv., for instance.

contemporaries to look at the past from a religious point of view, could not possibly have been so proud of their people had it not possessed many excellences.

And so indeed it did. All that Hosea and Amos said was doubtless true; but there was another side to the picture, and on this they did not look. They fell into exaggerations, as all preachers of repentance are in danger of doing.

The manners of the Israelites of the eighth century B.C. were certainly rude in comparison with ours. Their notions of honour, temperance, chastity, love, and—above all—integrity, were still defective. Moreover, the moral code which they did recognise as divine and binding, was very often, and in some cases very grossly, transgressed. But all this is true of every nation and in every age; and he who observes it in a special people at a special time, amidst his own surroundings, for example, has no right, on the strength of it, utterly to condemn the society in which he lives, still less to accuse it of falling away and going backwards. Such an accusation is most dangerous when not absolutely demanded by the facts, for it is so discouraging.¹ Moreover, in the case of Israel it was quite unjust. When we know the history of this people we may still speak of passing deviations, such as that of worshipping Baal to the detriment of the nobler service of Yahweh; but we shall remember that just as each man “errs as long as he strives,” so peoples too are sure sometimes to go astray; but if they afterwards return to the true path, it shows that they have learned their lesson and have gathered moral strength from their attempts to make good their errors. Now, throughout the course of Israel’s history we trace a steady progress. In the seven centuries that had elapsed between the Exodus and the reign of Jeroboam II., the seed which Moses sowed had borne rich fruit. The rude hordes amongst which he planted the moral worship of Yahweh had grown

¹ Vol. II., pp. 146—148.

into a people in whose midst a true national life had developed in more than one direction.

What a difference of social condition between those wandering tribes contending with each other for the booty and this nation governed by a king, and with the elements of an organised administration of justice ! What a difference between the hordes who had no literature, and but few of whom could even read or write, and the Israel of the eighth century B.C., with its psalmists, proverb-makers, and historians ! What a difference between the motley polytheism of the days of Moses, with its stone and tree worship, and the conception of Yahweh as the Most High, the creator of heaven and earth, by whose side no other may be worshipped !

But had Israel sunk as low as Amos and Hosea seem to think, from a moral point of view ? We have no right to believe it. On the other hand, we can trace decided progress in many respects here also. For whereas the Israelites, in Joshua's days, had laid Jericho, Ai, and Sephath, as well as other cities, under the ban, their descendants gradually gave up even the far less savage practice of executing the malefactor's children together with himself. It is true that the writers of this later age still commend Joshua for having put the Canaanites to the sword, and regard it as a weakness in their ancestors to have omitted in some cases to root out the old inhabitants. But, in treating of an age so far gone by, people do not realise the horror of a massacre ; and even tender-hearted men may sometimes speak of it with indifference. But that human life had become more precious in the eyes of the Israelites is shown, amongst other things, by Hosea's threatening the house of Jehu with punishment for "the massacre of Jezreel," which can only mean the slaughter effected by Jehu in his "zeal for Yahweh." It seems to have produced a painful impression upon many people even at the time. Samuel hews the captive prince of

the Amalekites in pieces ; and, even as late as in Ahab's time, a prophet rebukes the king for sparing Benhadad's life, when Yahweh's curse was upon him ; but when the king of Israel asks Elisha whether he is to slay the Syrians, whom Yahweh has struck blind, and who have been brought to Samaria, the prophet answers : " Not at all ! You would not slay your captives ! " Consider, again, the gentle and equitable spirit that breathes through the Israelitish laws.¹

The people amongst whom the sketch of Abram was made, as the father of the faithful, full of generosity, interceding for Sodom and ready to obey his god in everything ; the people in whose midst an influential party zealously opposed all luxury and pride, nay, even art and study, for fear of the moral dangers that accompanied them,—such a people cannot have stood at a very low level of morality. And was there not a strong moral element in the contempt with which the people of Yahweh looked down upon the old inhabitants of the land ? Did they not maintain the struggle against the " abominations of the Canaanites " with successful pertinacity ? Surely Israel made progress in morality as well as in other things, but its progress was too slow to satisfy earnest men, too slow for them to see !

This moral progress is evinced by other writings than those of the prophets ; by the sayings of the " wise men " of this period, for instance. Our book of Proverbs consists of several collections which are not all of the same age. Only one of these is provided with a superscription that fixes its date.² It states that it was made at the command of king Hezekiah ; and since Samaria fell in the sixth year of this king's reign, the proverbs collected in his day belong to the last period of Israel's existence. We have also another collection³ which appears to be a little older. We have no

¹ See pp. 240—242. ² Proverbs xxv.—xxix. ³ Proverbs x.—xxii. 16.

means of deciding whether these proverbs were uttered in Judah or in Israel; but it is of little consequence, for the moral condition of the northern kingdom did not differ materially from that of the southern. Now when we read these sayings of the "wise men," we are struck at once by the deep moral feeling which they often evince.

Not that they all impress us favourably! Some of them are very common-place. For instance, "The poor man is mostly despised, but the rich man respected."¹ "The buyer says 'dear! very dear!' and then goes and boasts of his bargain."² "The people curse the factor who holds back his corn to make prices rise, but bless the one who sells it;"³ and the remark that these speculations on the rise or fall of the market sometimes fail!⁴ Occasionally the advice given by the sages is even of doubtful morality, and they are too fond of declaring that every man has his price. "For a piece of bread anyone will sin;" "a bribe always gains its end."⁵

Many other sayings, however, show fine powers of observation, deep religious feeling, and, in some cases, penetrating moral insight. Warnings against dishonesty abound, and integrity in life and business is commended;⁶ the humble and pious are exalted, and are promised wealth, honour, and long life, as rewards;⁷ backbiting is severely rebuked,⁸ for "love conceals every trespass."⁹ The sages utter warnings against hasty speech,¹⁰ and urgently commend silence as better than speech on many occasions.¹¹ There is much sound sense in the advice, "Give not your friend too much of your company, lest he grow tired of you and come to hate you;"¹² and in the

¹ Proverbs xiv. 20, xviii. 23, xix. 6, 7.

² Proverbs xx. 14.

³ Proverbs xi. 26.

⁴ Proverbs xi. 24.

⁵ Proverbs xvii. 8, xviii. 16, xxi. 14, and xxviii. 21, after an amended version.

⁶ Proverbs x. 4, after an amended version, and xx. 10.

⁷ Proverbs xxii. 4.

⁸ Proverbs xi. 13, xviii. 8, xxvi. 22.

⁹ Proverbs x. 12, xvii. 9.

¹⁰ Proverbs xviii. 13.

¹¹ Proverbs xvii. 27, 28.

¹² Proverbs xxv. 17.

counsel not to praise oneself, but to wait for someone else to do it.¹

The sharp exhortations against sloth² are thus worked out in a later collection :³

Once I passed by the field of a sluggard,
 And the vineyard of a senseless man;
 And lo ! it was full of nettles, covered with thistles,
 And the stone wall was broken down.
 When I saw this I pondered it over ;
 When I perceived it I learned the lesson :
 " A little sleep, a little slumber,
 A little folding of the hands to rest,
 And your poverty comes like a robber ;
 Your want like an armed man ! "

A companion to this picture of the sluggard is furnished by the same collection, in the following sketch of a drunkard :⁴

With whom is " Out and alas ! " and strife ?
 Who have trouble, wounds without cause, heavy eyes ?
 They who sit late at night over wine,
 Who go into drink-shops to taste.
 Look not at the wine, at its ruddy glow,
 Sparkling in the cup, and gliding down !
 The end of it is that it bites like a serpent,
 And stings like an adder.
 Then your eyes wander after lewd women,
 And you think evil thoughts.
 You are like one that sleeps out at sea,
 Sleeps on the top of a mast.
 " They have struck me, but not made me sick ;
 They have beaten me, but I never marked it.
 As soon as I wake, I will have some more wine ! "

¹ Proverbs xxvii. 2.

Proverbs xix. 24, xx. 4, 13, xxii. 13.

² Proverbs xxiv. 30 ff.

⁴ Proverbs xxiii. 29-35 ; compare xx. 1.

Not even these warnings against sloth, intemperance, and gluttony,¹ however, give us so high an opinion of the moral perception of the proverb-writers as their fine observations of human nature and their exhortations to mercy. Some of the proverbs show deep feeling; for instance, "The heart knows its own bitterness; let not a stranger meddle with its joy!" and "Sometimes a man's heart is heavy even when he laughs, and the end of his mirth is trouble."² Pitifulness, especially to the poor, to widows, and to orphans, is much insisted on. "Remove not the boundary mark nor encroach on the orphans' inheritance; for their redeemer is mighty, he will take up their cause."³ "He who has pity on the poor lends to Yahweh; he will reward him for his bounty."⁴ The sages even noticed the different ways in which men treated their animals: "A good man knows the wants of his beast, but the mercy of the godless is cruelty."⁵

Many of the proverbs are marked by a very religious spirit. Their authors share the convictions of the contemporary prophets,⁶ and had evidently a good understanding with them. "If there is no prophecy, the people are unrestrained; but happy is he who receives instruction."⁷ "Integrity and virtue are more acceptable than sacrifice to Yahweh;"⁸ "The sacrifice of the godless is an abomination to Yahweh, but the good man's prayer is his delight."⁹

Now of course these collections of proverbs do not prove that the convictions and principles which they express found an echo in every heart; but surely they do show that the people in whose midst such sayings passed from mouth to mouth was far from a degenerate, godless race, insensible to

¹ Proverbs xxiii. 1—3.

² Proverbs xiv. 10, 13.

³ Proverbs xxiii. 10, 11.

⁴ Proverbs xix. 17.

⁵ Proverbs xii. 10.

⁶ See p. 104.

⁷ Proverbs xxix. 18.

⁸ Proverbs xxi. 3.

⁹ Proverbs xv. 8, xxi. 27, xxviii. 9.

the demands of morality. For these proverbs, be it remembered, were made by no prophets or priests, professional moralists as we might call them, but by simple citizens, who produced them for each other's benefit as they sat together in the gate; and if they who uttered such sayings—characterised on the whole by so much moral earnestness—were revered as sages by their fellow-citizens, surely the people must have been very far from immoral.

The morality of any period may be pretty fairly gauged by the regard in which it holds the state of marriage, and by the social place which it allows to woman. Now the state of things in Israel, as in all ancient nations, left much to be desired in these respects. Not only was the bride bought by the bridegroom, but polygamy prevailed both amongst the nobles and amongst the citizens. The stories of the patriarchs show that no one saw any harm in this practice, fraught as it really is with peril to love, to home life, and to chastity, and fatal as it is to the moral life of woman. Yet respect for women was by no means wanting. Even the Ten Commandments mention respectful conduct towards father *and mother* in a single breath. The legend places a woman, Miriam, by the side of Moses and Aaron as one of Israel's deliverers from Egypt. Women as well as men might be inspired by Yahweh; and a Deborah might be glorified as a prophetess. The touching story told to David by Nathan proves beyond all doubt that the Israelites well knew how deep the love of a man for his one wife may be. That single ewe lamb that the poor man had bought and loved so tenderly, that grew up with him and his children, ate of his bread, drank from his cup, and slept on his breast at night, represents Uriah's one and only wife, so truly loved by her husband. So too, in the Proverbs, the praises of a good wife are sung again and again: "A capable wife is the crown of

her lord ;”¹ “A prudent wife is a gift of Yahweh.”² Evidently, then, domestic virtues and domestic bliss were held in high esteem.

Since we only possess those portions of the literature of the Israelites which the Jews of a later age regarded as Sacred Writings, we have but scant remains of their heroic poems and love-songs, which would have taught us so much as to their civilisation and culture ; but, luckily, we do possess one love poem, which the collectors of the Sacred Writings probably took up because they fancied there was some hidden spiritual meaning in it. It is the so-called Song of Solomon, or Song of Songs ; that is, “most excellent song.”

The superscription of the song assigns the authorship to Solomon ; but this is certainly incorrect, for Solomon’s vanity would never have permitted him to immortalise himself under the character of an unsuccessful suitor ! Perhaps the poem was originally entitled “Solomon.” We cannot tell for certain when it was written, but there is a good deal to be said for the opinion that it dates from the time of Jeroboam II., and that is why we mention it here.

If only it were easier to understand ! But, alas ! it is very obscure in many places. It evidently comprises dialogues, or at any rate words spoken under several characters, and shows indications of change of scene ; but we are never told who is speaking, or where we are supposed to be. Various expounders are gradually reaching agreement as to certain points, but still every fresh translation and interpretation departs in many respects from its predecessors.

The subject is love, regarded from its physical side and with all the passion that marks the Oriental character. The heroine of the poem, the Shulammit, that is, the maid of Shulem or Shunem, sings : “I conjure you, ye women of

¹ Proverbs xi. 16, xii. 4, xiv. 1.

² Proverbs xix. 14.

Jerusalem, should you find my beloved, to tell him that I am sick with love!" Should the poem need a motto, it might well be found in the following lines :—

Love is strong as death ;
Passion is mighty as the realms of the dead.
Its flames are flames of fire,
A lightning flash of Yahweh.
No floods of water can put out love ;
Nor rivers wash it away.
Though one should offer all the wealth of his house
for it,
He would be rejected with scorn.

The poem, then, moves in a sphere in which many a man's moral life has been wrecked, but we may judge of the purity of the poet's conceptions from the contents of his song.

The Shulammite girl was the young and beautiful daughter of a widow who belonged to the class of well-to-do yeomanry. She was betrothed to a shepherd. Her brothers set her to watch the vineyard, under their own superintendence, and she was therefore rather sunburnt ; but in spite of that she was so beautiful that the purveyors for Solomon's harem carried her off to the palace. The king, however, sought in vain to win her love. Her whole heart was still full of her shepherd lover. The wanton life of the harem and the dazzling splendour of the court are drawn with seductive warmth. Read, for instance, the following description of a wedding procession of the lavish monarch :—

Look at the couch, at Solomon's couch !
With sixty heroes ranged around it,
Chosen from Israel's mighty ones.
All of them handle the sword,
And are exercised in war ;

Their swords are girt to their hips,
To prevent the nightly surprise !
Solomon made him a palanquin
From timber of Lebanon ;
He made its columns of silver,
He made the floor of gold,
The seat he made of purple,
Graced in the midst by a loved one,
One of Jerusalem's daughters !
Come then, O daughters of Sion, and see !
Look on king Solomon with the crown
Wherewith his mother has crowned him,
On the day of his bridal,
The day of the joy of his heart !

From the rapturous tone of this description we learn how high an honour it was reckoned for a girl to be taken into the harem of a king, and above all such a king as Solomon. What parents would not desire such a distinction for their child !

Moreover, Solomon strains all his powers to make the Shulammite forget her home. But it is all in vain !

I am my beloved's
And he is mine !

Such is the constant burden of her reply, and her resolve to go back to her lover is never shaken. All Solomon's flattering speeches and all his promises fail to win her, and at last he is compelled to let her go. She may well boast :

I was inaccessible as a wall,
My bosom impregnable as a castle ;
I was as one in his eyes who must be left to go in peace !

A people who loved such songs celebrating an invincible love, passionate, indeed, to the last degree, but perfectly inno-

cent, such a people cannot have been a prey to moral corruption. The preachers of repentance, then, whose standard of morality was higher than that of their neighbours, may often have been justified in rebuking, admonishing, and threatening their contemporaries, and exhorting them to lead purer lives; but when they describe Israel in the age of Jeroboam II. as an adulteress and an apostate, a people ripe for destruction, they are taking a one-sided view of the facts, involuntarily exalting the past and painting the present in colours far too dark. However much there was to blame in the people, it was sound at heart, nor could any trace be found of fatal inward corruption.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FALL OF THE NORTHERN KINGDOM.

2 KINGS XV—XVI. 9, XVII. 1—6.¹

“YAHWEH lifts up an ensign to the heathens dwelling afar, and calls them together from the ends of the earth. See! they are coming, swift of foot and light; not one of them stumbles, not one is weary! He sleeps not, nor slumbers. The girdle is not loosed from his loins, nor the sandals from his feet. His arrows are all of them sharpened, and his bows are bent. His horses' hoofs are as hard as flint, and his chariot wheels like a whirlwind. He roars like a lioness, roars like a raging lion holding grimly to his prey! None can snatch from him what he carries away! On that day is a sound as of rushing waves, and if they look landward, there is fearful darkness; the light is obscured by clouds.” Such are the words in which Isaiah² describes the Assyrians, whose approach had already inspired the Israelites and Judeans with terror, even in the time of Jeroboam II.

¹ 2 Chronicles xxvi., xxvii.

² Isaiah v. 26—30.

Of the earliest history of this warlike people we know very little;¹ but in the eighth century B.C. we find their king, Pul, advancing eastwards, and subduing one after another the territories of Babylonia, Elam, Media, and Armenia, till he reigns over all the lands from the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea. Then he turns westward, and conquers Mesopotamia and Syria.² Even before Jeroboam's death Pul had occupied Hamath, and the dreaded conquerors stood close on the northern frontier of Israel, which would come into closer contact with them but too soon.

Jeroboam's reign was a long one. It lasted certainly one and forty years, as is directly stated,³ probably three and fifty, as may be inferred from other data, for he ascended the throne fifteen years before Uzziah became king of Judah,⁴ and it was not till the thirty-eighth year of that monarch that his son succeeded him.⁵ An interregnum is quite out of the question, and we must therefore suppose that some mistake has crept into one of the conflicting numbers. However this may be, Jeroboam's son, Zachariah, was publicly murdered by a certain Shallum in the year 770 B.C. after a reign of six months. The historian does not fail to remind us of the oracle vouchsafed to Jehu that his house should hold the throne of Israel to the fourth generation. Shallum only kept the crown a single month, after which a certain Menahem marched upon him from Tirzah, defeated and slew him, and reigned in his stead. There was probably a third pretender, who lost his life in his attempt to secure the crown.

This last particular may be inferred from a discourse preserved in Zachariah ix.—xi. These three chapters are not from the same hand as those that precede them, but date from the last century of the northern kingdom. We cannot be sure of the writer's name, but he was probably

¹ Compare Vol. I., pp. 109 ff.

² See Map I.

³ 2 Kings xiv. 23.

⁴ 2 Kings xiv. 17.

⁵ 2 Kings xv. 8.

called Zachariah son of Berechiah, whereas the writer of the first eight chapters, who lived more than two hundred years later, was called Zachariah the son of Iddo. It is far from certain that even these three chapters are all from the same hand. They contain many obscurities; nor is the concluding passage,¹ to which we must now turn our attention, by any means free from difficulties, but the general purport of the discourse and the main thought it is intended to bring out are clear enough. The prophet's words are instinct with pity for the miserable condition of his people, which offered such a sad contrast to the prosperity they had enjoyed under Jeroboam. The passage may be rendered something as follows:—

Yahweh, my god, said to me: "Pasture these cattle for slaughter! When they are sold the purchaser holds himself free from guilt though they are destroyed, and the seller cries "Blessed be Yahweh, it has made me rich!" and their shepherds do not pity them. The dwellers in this land are like them, for I will take pity on them no more; but I will give them over into the hands of their neighbours and of their king, and they shall break the land in pieces, and no one shall deliver it out of their hand." Thereupon I began to pasture those cattle for slaughter; but in truth they were sorry beasts. I took two staves and called the one Prosperity and the other Union, and with them I pastured the cattle. But when I had dismissed three shepherds in one month I waxed bitter against my cattle and they loathed me. Then I said, "I will pasture you no more. Let die who will, and let who may be thrust aside, and let the rest devour one another." So I took my staff Prosperity and broke it to pieces as a sign that I had broken my covenant with all the tribes. So the staff was broken to pieces, and the wretched cattle that looked on soon perceived that it was a word of

¹ Zachariah xi. 4-17.

Yahweh. Then like a shepherd leaving his service, I asked them: "Will it please you to give me any wages? If not, then let it rest!" But they gave me my wages—a poor thirty shekels. Then Yahweh said to me, "Throw it into the box of offerings!" It is a noble price at which they have valued me!" And accordingly I went and threw the money into the chest of offerings in Yahweh's house. Thereupon I broke my other staff, the staff of Union, because the brotherhood of Judah and Israel must be broken. Then Yahweh said to me again: "Now take the implements of a foolish shepherd, for behold! I will raise up a shepherd in this land who shall not seek for those that have been cast out, nor tend those that have gone astray, nor heal the sick, nor support those that still can stand, but shall eat the flesh of the fat ones and break their hoofs in pieces." Woe to my worthless shepherd who cares not for the sheep! The sword shall fall upon his arm and strike out his right eye. Yea, his arm shall be maimed and his right eye darkened!—

The mention of three shepherds, all dismissed within one month, leads us to suppose that besides Zachariah and Shallum some third adventurer occupied the throne for a little time. The foolish shepherd mentioned by the prophet is a striking likeness of Menahem. He was a tyrannical ruler, and evidently owed his crown to no respect or love on the part of the Israelites, but simply to the adroitness with which he availed himself of the state of indecision and confusion into which the country was plunged by the murder of Jeroboam's son. Tiphsah, a city between Tirzah and Samaria which had refused to side with him, now paid a fearful penalty, for he massacred its inhabitants with circumstances of extreme barbarity. Moreover, it tells heavily against him that he could only keep the crown he had seized so violently by the aid of foreign soldiers, which he

¹ After an amended version.

did not hesitate to secure. In vain did the prophet Hosea lift a warning voice against thus "mixing with the heathen,"¹ and call his people an innocent and foolish dove because it appealed to Assyria and called on Egypt for help, like a bird running into a snare.² Menahem could not do without the Assyrians. Of course their king, Pul, did not wait to be pressed when the ruler of Israel begged him to support his throne, but he exacted a heavy price for his services. Menahem had to pay no less than a thousand talents of silver (at least a hundred and twenty-five thousand pounds of our money), to raise which he laid a tax upon his subjects of fifty shekels (over three pounds sterling) for every man capable of bearing arms. The staff Prosperity was indeed broken!

The staff Union, the brotherhood of Judah and Israel, was also broken. For soon after Jeroboam's death Uzziah, king of Judah, had made himself master of the important haven of Elath, and had greatly extended his power. He waged successful wars against the Philistines and several Arab tribes, made the Ammonites tributary, and so greatly strengthened Jerusalem with towers, walls, and catapults, as to make it almost impregnable. Moreover, agriculture and cattle-breeding flourished; and, in a word, Judah enjoyed a period of rare prosperity. When Uzziah died at last, after a reign of two and twenty years, he was succeeded by his son Jotham, who had already held the reins of government during the last years of his father's life, because the latter had become a leper. Jotham, who remained for sixteen years upon the throne, was as vigorous a ruler as his father, and Judah, therefore, grew in power and prosperity. It is not unnatural that the Israelites should have looked on these events with jealous eyes, for the last chance of Judah's

¹ Hosea vii. 8.² Hosea vii. 11, 12.

ever bowing beneath the sceptre of their king was rapidly disappearing. As far as we know, however, actual war did not break out between the two kingdoms, either under Menahem or his son Pekahiah. But when Pekahiah had reigned two years, he was bereft of life and throne by Pekah, the son of Remaliah, an officer of the royal body-guard; and this Pekah braced all his powers to the task of overthrowing the house of David, and reducing Judah to dependence.

The plan, however, did not originate with himself, but with Rezin, the ruler of Damascus. A certain son of Tabeal, probably a Syrian, was to be appointed king of Judah.¹

Just as half a century before many Judæans had desired to be reunited with Israel, and had cried, "O Yahweh, listen to Judah's prayer, and bring him back to his people!"² so now, too, many of them favoured the project of Rezin and Pekah. Isaiah, comparing the beneficent rule of the Davidic dynasty to the waters of the spring Siloah, hard by Jerusalem, exclaimed,³ "Because this people despises the softly-flowing waters of Siloah, and takes delight in Rezin and the son of Remaliah, therefore, says Yahweh, I will make a mighty river rise and flood the whole of Judah."

Jotham, however, offered a successful resistance as long as he lived, but his son Ahaz was driven into fearful straits by the allies. Luckily for him Jerusalem was so well fortified that Pekah's attempts against it failed; but the Syrian troops took Elath and placed this key to the peninsula of Sinai in the hands of the Edomites, who kept permanent possession of it thenceforth.⁴ The Philistines, too, recovered their former possessions. It appears that Ahaz was driven in his terror to the same desperate measure which the Moabite king Mesha had formerly adopted. He sacrificed his first-born son to his god in the hopes of compelling him to help

¹ Isaiah vii. 6.

² See pp. 251, 253, 254.

³ Isaiah viii. 6, 7.

⁴ 2 Kings xvi. 6, where *Edomites* should stand instead of *Syrians*.

him. According to the Chronicles he also worshipped the gods of the Syrians, in order to win them over to his side. But all was in vain. Destruction stared him in the face. There was only one means of escape within his reach—to call in the help of the Assyrians. And that was a cure which might well seem worse than the disease. To this last resource, however, he was actually driven. He sent an embassy to the Assyrian king, Tiglath-Pilezer, with the promise of rich presents and submission as a vassal if he would rescue him from Rezin and Pekah. Tiglath-Pilezer was soon persuaded, and made an inroad upon Syria. The two monarchs were no match for him. Damascus fell into his hands, and Rezin himself was slain. Pekah's turn came next, but he was not so completely subdued as his late ally. He escaped with his life and even kept his crown ; but the northern portion of his kingdom, together with the whole of Gilead, was conquered and bereft of the cream of its inhabitants.

This latter circumstance was due not so much to the slaughter which accompanied the capture of the cities, as to the Assyrians' practice of carrying away great numbers of the peoples they conquered into captivity, and transplanting them to some distant part of their enormous empire. The reasons for this policy are evident. It was intended to compel the conquered districts to keep quiet and bear the yoke submissively. So they stripped the country of all its most distinguished and cultivated inhabitants. The men of wealth and learning, the priests, the artists, and the skilled workmen were carried off in great numbers. Those who remained were bereft of their leaders, and were too fully occupied in endeavouring to provide for their own immediate wants to be able to think of rebellion ; and the exiles themselves, transported as they were to a foreign land, and set down in the middle of a population whose language they could not understand, were compelled to smother their love of freedom and

their hatred of their oppressors, and devote all their energies to agriculture, cattle breeding, commerce, and industry. Thus flourishing colonies of Gileadites, for instance, arose in the heart of Assyria.

Pekah's star did not set just yet, in spite of his reverses. Indeed he still seems to have cherished hopes of restoring his fortunes; for soon after his defeat the Judæan prophet Isaiah uttered this threat:¹ "The Lord sends his word against Jacob, and it falls upon Israel; let all the people know and all the inhabitants hear it; for they say in their pride and vain-glory of heart: 'There were only tiles that fell, but we will build up again with granite; wild fig-trees were hewn down, but we will replace them with cedars.' Of a truth the Syrians shall attack them in front, and the Philistines behind, and shall devour Israel with open mouth, and even yet Yahweh's wrath shall not cease!"

But though this prophecy was not fulfilled, and Israel had a few years' rest, yet Pekah met the fate of so many of his predecessors, and fell by the hand of conspirators. His murderer, Hosea, became king in his place. Under his reign Israel fell. The Assyrian king Shalmaneser continued Tiglath-Pilezer's work of conquest, and made Israel tributary. A few years afterwards Hosea, fired apparently by the encouraging example of Tyre, which had now defied the power of Assyria for five years, refused his tribute. He relied upon the support of So (or Sabakos), the king of Egypt, who was alarmed by the great extension of Shalmaneser's power. But the Assyrian penetrated right into the land of Israel, up to the walls of Samaria, which offered a brave resistance three whole years. No army came from Egypt to the rescue, and at last the men of Samaria, weakened and thinned as is usual in such circumstances, by plague and famine, were compelled to yield. King Hosea was treated with special

¹ Isaiah ix. 8-12.

favour, for his life was spared, and he was simply confined in some Assyrian fortress. A great number of the Israelites, an Assyrian inscription says twenty-seven thousand two hundred and eighty, were carried away to a district in the Assyrian province of Media. This took place in the year 719 or 720 B.C.

So northern Israel had fallen, fallen for ever ! It never became an independent people again. The captive Israelites gradually melted away into the peoples amongst whom they had been placed ; while those who remained in Canaan mingled, as we shall see hereafter, with heathens, and, though they had a history of their own, never did anything more for the progress of the world. The work of Moses and his great successors, the prophets, was but half accomplished in Israel, and was then broken off. It was only in Judah that it was carried on.

Here is food enough for reflection !

When such a great event takes place, how can anyone who thinks help asking : " Why ? " The answer to the question depends upon the point of view from which it is asked. No doubt the Baal worshippers of the eighth century B.C. said that Israel had fallen as a punishment for no longer serving Baal ; but at this time they were in a small minority. The great majority of the prophets, who had sung without reserve of the glory and greatness of Israel, now held their peace in confusion of face, could see no more visions, and knew not what to say when reminded of the words once uttered by the prophet of repentance, " The *teraphim* utter vain oracles ; the soothsayers see false visions ; the dreams are deceitful ; and they all console you with idle consolation. They shall, therefore, wander about like sheep, like wretched cattle without a herdsman." ¹

¹ Zachariah x. 2.

The preachers of repentance, on the other hand, were now crowned with honour, for their words had turned out true; and their explanation of Israel's disasters won its way to more general acceptance: Yahweh was punishing the sins of his worshippers, for Israel was a godless people! Such was the view which the Judæan editor of the book of Kings took of the fate of Israel, and, accordingly, after recounting the fall of Samaria, he explains, in rather a long digression, that the Israelites had drawn their disasters upon their own heads by their idolatries, their worship of images, their obstinate refusal to hear the prophets, and, last not least, their rebellion against the house of David.¹

The essential element in this view of the history, namely, the theory that Israel was sent into exile as a punishment for its sins, reappears in the writings of the greatest prophets of the time, and became the current explanation amongst the later Jews of the mournful history of their people. Yet it is utterly untrue. Immorality does indeed undermine national prosperity, and a healthy piety adds to a nation's strength; yet it is no more true of a people than it is of an individual that its fate depends entirely, or even chiefly, upon its devoutness. Its fate depends upon all manner of circumstances, and whatever their connection with the will of God may be, at any rate they are not so ordained as to secure un-failing prosperity to the pious and bring constant disasters upon the godless. The natural causes of Israel's fall are obvious enough. It could not hold out against the superior forces of Assyria, and was therefore conquered in common with so many other peoples. But when we come to the question: Why must this be? we must be content without an answer, just as in the case of a man whose fate fills us with sorrow.²

Instead of complacently saying "It was their own fault!"

¹ 2 Kings xvii. 7-23. Compare xviii. 11, 12. ² Compare Vol. II. p. 123.

when we see the Israelites fall, we regard the spectacle with the same uncontrollable sadness which fills us when a young life, full of promise, is cut off before its prime. There was so much life, so much promise in Israel! Judged by the ideal standard of Christianity, it may seem to have stood but low; yet at least there was progress, and its defects were gradually yielding to the better spirit. We can therefore sympathise with the expectation of the prophets, shared even by those who had the keenest eye for their people's sins, and who anticipated a fearful judgment on them,—the expectation, namely, that Israel would be restored at last, purified by the fire of affliction, and would become Yahweh's people indeed. That this expectation was never realised and that northern Israel vanished without a trace is a thought to fill us with sorrow.

In the preceding chapters we have laid intentional emphasis upon the progress which Israel had made in many directions. There was still much to condemn, especially in the moral condition of the people; and the gilt images at Dan and Bethel evinced a very gross conception of God's nature and the service which is pleasing in his sight. But in this respect also there was every reason to hope for improvement. The prophets of former times had left the bull-worship unchallenged, but Hosea attacks it with all his might. Indeed, the more highly cultured Israelites, especially the prophets, had altogether outgrown it. The images still stood, but they were already tottering. It deserves remark that while we are told of all the other kings of Israel in succession that they committed "the sins of Jeroboam" the historian does not bring this accusation against the last of them, Hosea, but tells us that he did less evil than his predecessors. Is it possible that he took some steps towards abolishing the golden bulls? However this may be, they would certainly have fallen sooner or later.

But the newer conception of Yahweh's nature, which was wholly inconsistent with any representation of him by images, was as yet but half established, and even in the minds of many representative poets and prophets it was still alloyed by many of the thoughts and customs of an earlier day. This is well exemplified in a song, which dates from the closing years of Israel's existence, and has been taken up into the book of Deuteronomy,¹ as the parting song of Moses. We give the greater part of it,² which runs as follows:—

Remember the days of old,
Consider the years of past generations ;
Ask your father ; and he will tell it ;
Your elders ; and they will declare it :
When the Most High gave the nations their heritage
And divided the children of men,
He fixed the boundaries of the peoples
After the number of the sons of God.
For Yahweh's portion is his people,
Jacob his special possession.
He found him in the desert
On the howling steppes of the wilderness.
He guided and taught him
Kept him as the apple of his eye.
Like as an eagle stirs up her nest
And hovers over her brood,
Spreads out her wings and takes them up,
Bears them upon her pinions,
So Yahweh alone guided Israel:
No strange god stood by his side.
He made him ride over the heights of the earth
And eat of the produce of the fields,
Suck honey out of the rock
And oil out of the flint-stones.

¹ Deuteronomy xxxii.² Verses 7—21, 29, 30, 36—43.

He gave him butter from kine and milk from the
smaller cattle,

Gave him the fat of lambs,
Of rams of Bashan and goats.

He gave you wheaten flour,
And you drank pure wine, the blood of grapes.
But Jeshurun grew fat, and kicked out.—

You grew fat and gross, and were smothered with
fatness.—

Then he deserted the god that made him,
And lightly esteemed the rock that delivered him.

They moved him to jealousy with strange gods,
Provoked him to wrath with abominations.

Made sacrifice to goblins that are no god,

To gods whom they did not know,
To upstart gods, that were but now heard of,
And whom your fathers never had feared.

But you rejected the rock that bore you,
Forgot the god that begat you.

This Yahweh saw and he contemned [you],
In wrath with his sons and daughters.

He resolved to avert his countenance from them,
And see what would then become of them !

For they are a perverse generation,
Children in whom is no faith.

“ Since they have made me jealous with a no-god
And provoked me with vanities,

I will make them jealous with a people not a people,
And goad them with a senseless nation.”

Oh that they were wise, that they had understanding !

Then they would see what it leads to.
How could one of them chase a thousand
And two put ten thousand to flight,

Except their rock himself had sold them,
And Yahweh delivered them up ?

Yahweh shall judge his people
And take pity on his servants,
When he sees that Israel's power is gone
And there are no men left.
Then will he say: "Where now are their gods ?
Where is the rock upon which they trusted,
The gods, whose sacrifices they ate,
The wine of whose offerings they drank ?
Let them rise up and help you,
That they may be your refuge !
See then that I, that I, am he,
And there is no god beside me !
I kill and I make alive,
I wound and I heal ;
None can deliver from my hand.
If then I lift up my hand to heaven
And say : 'As sure as I live for ever !'
If I whet the lightning of my sword,
And stretch out my hand to judgment,—
Then will I take vengeance upon my foes
And fully repay my enemies.
I will make my arrows drunk with blood,
My sword shall devour flesh,
Devour the blood of the slain and the captives,
The shaggy skull of the foe."
Sing his people's glory, ye nations !
For he avenges his servants' blood
He repays it all on his enemies ;
He is reconciled to his land and people !

This poem deserves our closest attention on many accounts, foremost amongst which is the poet's strange con-

ception of his god. Who is this Yahweh? On the one hand, he is a most exalted being, who kills and makes alive; nay, who rules over all things, and beside whom no other god exists. But, at the same time, the poet not only loves to celebrate him as the "Rock" which reflects the beliefs of a more ancient day,¹ but actually describes him as whetting his sword for battle, making his arrows drink the blood of the enemy slain in the field, and even of the captives slaughtered after the victory, and giving his sword the foe-man's head to eat! Of course, all these expressions are only figures of speech, but they are figures borrowed from a very rude conception of Yahweh's nature. Here we see the old and the new ideals side by side. The old conception of Yahweh as the fierce, blood-thirsty, warlike tribal god of Israel is passing away; the new conception of Yahweh, as the creator of all the world, is springing up, and is, indeed, already recognised as true, but has not yet sunk deep enough into the heart and mind to have entirely expelled the representations borrowed from the old beliefs. But did the poet really believe Yahweh to be the only god? If so, what can those words mean which occur near the beginning of the first passage we have translated, "Yahweh fixed the boundaries of the nations, according to the number of the sons of God?" The Authorised Version, following the Hebrew text, reads "according to the number of the children of Israel," which makes no sense. Our translation rests upon the reading of the old Greek version, and is perfectly intelligible. Yahweh determined everything, not only where all the peoples should live,² but even what gods each of them should serve; he ordained that various other nations should worship the sun, the moon, and the stars,³ while he chose Israel for his own special possession. The poet, then, repre-

¹ Compare Vol. I., p. 230.

² Compare Amos ix. 7.

³ Deuteronomy iv. 19, 20.

sents Yahweh as the only god with whom Israel had anything to do, and as the god of gods, but not, strictly speaking, the only god. We find the same wavering conception even in such a man as Isaiah, who never flatly denies the existence of the other gods.

Now in Judah, the heir of Israel's literature and its prophetic schools, we find these vacillations gradually giving way, and the germ of the higher conception unfolding. But, as far as we can tell, the religion of Israel suffered irreparably from the fact of its being finally developed in Judah only, and not in northern Israel as well; for in the latter district the religion of Yahweh had had the opportunity of growing up without being overshadowed by the influence of the priestly caste which wrought such mischief to it in Judah.

Two stems shot up from the common root, and the one that gave the richest promise was cut down ere its fruit had grown half ripe! But it is useless to bewail the fall of Israel. Henceforth all our hopes for the worship of Yahweh must rest on the weaker stem that yet remains—must rest, that is, on Judah.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CALL OF ISAIAH.

ISAIAH VI.

THE last century of Israel's existence was rendered illustrious, as we have seen, by the activity of the prophets, who were no longer turbulent popular leaders, as in former times, but orators and writers. The same holds good of Judah. The prophets in this kingdom never exercised a direct influence upon the affairs of state, but here, too, as in Israel, they became conspicuous for their labours as historians and public speakers.

Amongst the prophets of Judah a prominent place belongs to Isaiah, who prophesied from the last year of Uzziah's life right on into the second half of Hezekiah's reign. A book containing sixty-six chapters has come down to us under his name, but we cannot by any means accept all the oracles it contains as his. The men who collected the prophetic writings often performed their task in a grossly arbitrary fashion. Thus they appended to the oracles of Zachariah, who lived after the Captivity, the prophecies of at least two men who lived at sundry periods before that epoch; and in the same way they inserted amongst Isaiah's oracles, or appended at the close, a number of discourses which were really written many years after the fall of Jerusalem. In some instances it is extremely difficult to say whether a given prophecy is really the work of the prophet to whom it is assigned, or not; but in the case of Isaiah it is quite certain that several chapters in the first half of the book called after him, and all the last seven and twenty, are from other hands than his, and date from no earlier a period than that of the Captivity.

All that we know of his personal circumstances is that his father's name was Amoz, and that he himself had a wife and children.¹ He seems to have been a man of letters, for according to the Chronicles he wrote a life of king Uzziah,² and all his works display great literary talent. His style is more ornate and nervous, more exalted and poetical, than that of any other prophet whose discourses have come down to us. His tone of high cultivation, his familiarity with all that goes on in the upper circles, and the mode of his intercourse with the king, show that he was far from a stranger at the court. Perhaps he held some high position there.

He himself has painted in living colours the following picture of what he felt when first called to be a messenger of Yahweh!³

¹ Isaiah vii. 3, viii. 3, 18.

² 2 Chronicles xxvi. 22.

³ Isaiah vi.

In the year of Uzziah's death, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his servants filled the temple. Above him stood seraphs with six wings; covering their faces with one pair and their feet with another, and flying with the third. And one cried to another: "Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh of war-hosts; all the earth is full of his glory!" And lo! the portals trembled at the sound, and all the place was filled with smoke. Then I cried: "Woe is me! I am struck dumb, for I am a man of unclean lips, and dwell amidst a people of unclean lips; and now I have seen the king, Yahweh, of war-hosts!" Hereupon one of the seraphs flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. Then he touched my mouth with it and said, "Lo! this has touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is gone and thy sin is taken away." And straightway I heard the voice of the Lord, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for me?" And I said, "Here am I! Send me." "Go," he replied, "and tell this people to hear on, but not to mark; to see on, but perceive nothing. Make this people rebellious of heart and dull of understanding, lest they should even yet repent and I should have to heal them!" When I heard this dread command, I said again: "How long must this endure, O Lord?" and he replied, "Till the cities are all desolate, and the houses empty, and the land untilled. Then shall Yahweh carry the people away, and great desolation shall be throughout the land. Nay, though a tenth part still remain, even that is marked for destruction. Yet, as a terebinth or oak tree that is felled still leaves a stump in the ground, so has the sacred seed of Israel still hope for days to come."

If Isaiah had really seen and heard all this in a state of exaltation, it is impossible to understand his ever coming forward as a prophet. What man could undertake a task

like his, if he foresaw not only frequent disappointment, but complete and absolute failure? We must bear in mind that Isaiah probably wrote this account of his call at a time when he had already found his people incorrigible, when all his work appeared to have been in vain, as though Yahweh had resolved not to deliver Judah, and had only sent the prophet in order to increase the people's guilt. One only hope remained. There was a germ of better things amongst the people still; and, when all was ruined, this germ would open out and spread and bear rich fruit.

We shall see presently that Isaiah, though he always anticipated suffering, did not always take so gloomy a view of the future as when he wrote the words we have just read.

But through all his changes of mood Isaiah was consistent in at least one thing, and that was his extreme reverence for Yahweh, the consuming fire,¹ the terror-waking god, whose unapproachable holiness had struck him dumb. It was this which made him shrink from the prophetic task until purified by the touch of heavenly fire. Yahweh was always a name of terror to Isaiah. "The Lord, Yahweh of war-hosts," he exclaims,² "shall kindle a flame beneath the enemy's glory. Israel's Light shall become a fire, his Holy One a flame, burning up all the thorns and thistles in a single day." And again,³ "Lo! Yahweh's name comes from afar, with burning wrath and towering smoke; his lips are full of fury, his tongue consumes like fire; his breath is like an overflowing torrent that reaches up to the neck, to winnow the heathens with the fan of destruction and set the bit that leads astray between the jaws of the nations. . . . Yahweh makes the glory of his voice to be heard, the descent of his arm to be seen, in fervid wrath and consuming flame, in clouds that burst with rain and hail-stones." And elsewhere,⁴ "In Sion

¹ Compare Vol. I., pp. 155 ff.

² Isaiah x. 16, 17.

³ Isaiah xxx. 27, 28, 30.

⁴ Isaiah xxxiii. 14.

the sinners quake for fear ; and trembling has seized the hypocrites. Which of us can live with a burning fire, or dwell with an eternal furnace?"

Now this dread of Yahweh was, in its origin, nothing else than the terror felt before the nature-god who revealed himself in thunder and lightning, and whose dread power was displayed in blight and sickness ; nor had Isaiah, or any of the highly cultured Israelites of his day, entirely outgrown this primitive conception, in spite of the exalted traits which already entered into their conception of Yahweh. But in Isaiah's case, at least, there was also a strong moral element in this dread of Yahweh. Not because he was weak, but because he was sinful did he tremble before Yahweh ; and if he would have Israel "fear and shudder" before his god, it is in the hope of his becoming more docile and obedient to him.¹ Like a true follower of Moses, he preached that Yahweh's wrath is chiefly stirred by human sin.

Generally speaking, Isaiah was profoundly dissatisfied with his people, who repaid Yahweh's care so ill. "Let me sing of my friend," he once exclaimed,² "a song about my friend and his vineyard. My friend had once a vineyard, lying on a fertile hill. He had dug it up and picked out all the stones, and planted it with choicest vines ; he built a lodge in the middle of it, and hewed a wine-press out of the rock ; but, when he looked for grapes, wild berries only grew there ! And now, you inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, be judges between me and my vineyard. What could I have done for it more than I have done ? Why must I hope in vain for grapes, and only find wild berries ? But I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard ! I will break down its hedge and it shall be wasted ; I will break down its fence and it shall be trampled ! I will utterly destroy it and will prune it and dig it no more, and thorns and thistles

¹ Isaiah xxix. 23, 24.

² Isaiah v.

shall grow there rankly; and I will forbid the very clouds to rain upon it.—Yea! the vineyard of Yahweh of war-hosts is Israel, and Judah his cherished plantation. He looked for reason, but found only treason; he looked for right, but found affright! Woe . . . !” and here the prophet bursts into denunciations of the rich, who add house to house and field to field; the dissolute, who drink and carouse from morning to night; the proud, the self-satisfied, the perverters of justice, all of whom Yahweh will bring low. “The underworld opens its jaws beyond measure, and down sinks all Israel’s glory!” Finally, the dread Assyrians are indicated as the instruments of Yahweh’s judgment.

The high price which Isaiah attached to morality, and the depth of his conviction that Yahweh asked nothing but an upright life from his worshippers, are evinced by the following rebuke,¹ amongst others: “Hear this word of Yahweh, you princes of Sodom! Give ear to the law of our god, you people of Gomorrah! What do all your sacrifices avail me, says Yahweh of war-hosts! I am full of burnt offerings of rams and fat of fed beasts. I have no pleasure in the blood of bullocks, of sheep, or of goats. And for coming to see my face,—who has required it of you? It is but trampling my courts! Bring me no more lying offerings! Your incense is an abomination to me. Feast of new moon and sabbath and religious assembly?—I cannot support unrighteousness that joins in festivals. Your new moons and holy days I hate. They are a burden to me, and I am weary of bearing them. When you stretch out your hands in prayer I avert my eyes; though you multiply entreaties I listen not, for your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean, put away your evil doings from before my sight, cease to do evil; but learn to do well, seek what is right, help the oppressed, succour the orphan, plead for the widow.—Let us

¹ Isaiah i. 10—20.

dispute together! says Yahweh: Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow; though crimson red they shall be like wool. If you leave your self-will and hearken, then you shall enjoy the good things of the land; but, if you refuse and rebel, then the sword shall consume you; for Yahweh has said it."

We have already noticed more than once that the prophets, especially Isaiah, were often one-sided in their conception of morality, and included in a sweeping denunciation of "all that is exalted," not only luxury, but the arts and sciences, together with every sign of commercial and industrial progress.¹ Just now we heard Isaiah condemning the grandees of Jerusalem, not only for their dissolute lives, but also for increasing their estates. So stern a censor of morals, living as he did in the capital, and even frequenting the court, must have seen much to excite his indignation. The voluptuousness of the distinguished women of Jerusalem gave him especial offence, and he was not the man to spare it! "Because the daughters of Sion," he cried,² "walk proudly with their necks stretched out, and with wanton eyes, mincing their gait to make their anklets tinkle, Yahweh will make bald their heads and expose them in nakedness. Then will he wrench off all these anklets, little suns and moons, ear-rings, armlets, veils and gauze, foot-bracelets, girdles and scent-boxes, amulets and finger-rings, nose-rings, festal robes, kerchiefs and mantles, pouches and shifts, turbans and tunics! Then shall be rottenness instead of balsam, a rope for a girdle, baldness for plaits, sackcloth for a mantle, and bruises for beauty. Moreover, your men shall fall by the sword, and your young men in battle; the gates of Jerusalem shall weep and wail, Jerusalem sit down in bereavement. Then seven women shall seize on one man, and say: We will eat our own bread and wear our own

¹ See pp. 124, 125.

² Isaiah iii. 16—iv. 1.

clothes ; only let us be called your wives, and take the reproach of being unmarried from us !”

But though it is chiefly the immorality of those around him that moves Isaiah, he leaves neither witchcraft nor image-worship unassailed. Take this discourse for example :¹ “ O house of Jacob, come let us walk in Yahweh’s light ! For thou, O Yahweh, hast rejected thy people, rejected the house of Jacob, because they are full of sorcery and witchcraft like the Philistines, and follow the ways of strangers.² So their land has grown full of silver and gold, and there is no end to their treasures, full of horses and countless chariots, full of idols ; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their own fingers have made !” Then follows the announcement that everything lofty shall be brought low,³ and that Yahweh alone shall be proudly exalted ; and in close connection with this the prophecy : “ As for the idols, they utterly vanish ! And the people hide in clefts of the rock and in holes of the earth, in terror of Yahweh and the splendour of his glory, when he arises to affright the earth. Then will a man throw away to the moles and bats the gods of silver and of gold which he made to worship, and will rejoice in Yahweh.”

Isaiah believed in common with the other prophets of his day that Yahweh was the almighty ruler of the world, who had chosen Israel as his special possession, who could defend it against all earthly powers, and who would surely do so if the people did but observe his commands and so secure his favour. In times of distress, accordingly, Isaiah urged his people to trust in Yahweh’s all-sufficient support, and to repent of their sins that he might be gracious to them. We have already noticed more than once that Isaiah, in common with

¹ Isaiah ii. 5—21.

² Compare 1 Kings xxii. 48, 49 ; 2 Chronicles xx. 35—37.

³ See p. 125.

most of his devout contemporaries, held very one-sided views in this respect, and distinctly condemned the taking of suitable measures to secure the people's prosperity and independence.¹ We shall presently observe the spirit of his exhortations to Ahaz during the war with Rezin and Pekah; but we must first say a few words as to his outlook into the future.

In speaking of Isaiah's expectations for the future, we must distinguish between two things. In the first place he expects the restoration of Israel, or at any rate of Judah. In this he resembles all the prophets; for they all of them cherished the belief that Yahweh's people was imperishable, and the more exalted their conception of Yahweh's being, the deeper their conviction that he, the god of gods, the only God, would rescue his people and crown it with honour. Those whose moral perceptions were purest expected chastisements in which the shallower men of god did not believe; but no preacher of repentance, however stern, ever foretold the final ruin of Israel. The announcement, then, of Israel's future might was exceedingly common in the mouths of the prophets; but when Isaiah foretold that a king of the house of David should bring these blessings to the people, he could still rely upon the assent of many, but no longer of all, his colleagues.

We have already remarked that in the time of Jeroboam II. there were men even amongst the Judæans who anticipated the most salutary results from his rule, but when his dynasty had fallen of course this was no longer possible; and since the Judæan historians of the eighth century B.C. had exalted David's era into a golden age, and David himself into the king after Yahweh's heart, it became impossible to many of the Judæans to imagine the glorious future of Israel without a king of David's house. It was then that a certain historian

¹ See Vol. I., pp. 29, 30; Vol. II. p. 67.

put into David's mouth the prayer,¹ "Thou art great, O god Yahweh! there is none like thee! nay, there is no other god beside thee. And what people is there like thy people Israel, whom thou hast redeemed from Egypt? Do, then, according to thy word, that men may glorify thy name for ever, and may say, 'Yahweh of war-hosts is god over Israel, and the house of thy servant David shall ever walk before thy face!'" Even before Jeroboam's death Amos, the Judæan, declared that the fallen tent of David should be raised again and its breaches healed; and Hosea himself, though a citizen of northern Israel, fixed all his hopes on Judah and her prince, and pointed forward to a time when the sons of Israel should repent and should seek Yahweh, their god, and David, their king.

In this connection we may also quote the sweet prediction of Zachariah,² "Rejoice, O daughter of Zion! Be glad, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold thy king comes to thee, righteous and victorious, a kindly man, riding on an ass, a she-ass's colt. Then shall the war-chariots be cast out of Ephraim, and the cavalry from Jerusalem; the weapons of war shall be broken, and he shall proclaim peace to the heathen. He shall rule from sea to sea, from the Euphrates to the end of the earth. And because I have made a covenant with you, your exiles shall return." It is true that the seer does not expressly state the family from which he expects this prince of peace and blessedness to spring, but since he is addressing "the daughter of Sion," or, as we might say, "the virgin city of Jerusalem," he evidently does not look forward to the return of Judah to Ephraim, but rather to the accession of the northern tribes to Judah; and he must therefore have expected the prince of peace to be a scion of the house of David—which is only natural in Zachariah the son of Berechiah, the friend and disciple of Isaiah.

¹ 2 Samuel vii. 22—26.

² Zachariah ix. 9—11; compare pp. 312, 313.

Since Israel's king was called the anointed (*mashiach*, corrupted by the Greeks into *messias*¹) of Yahweh,² these anticipations are called the *Messianic expectations* of the prophets, and the term is used to include all their prophecies of a golden age, even if, as is sometimes the case, no king appears in them at all.

We shall have frequent occasion to dwell upon the extreme importance of these expectations, for they supported Israel under the heaviest oppression and inspired it with the bravest heroism, till it furnished the world with a unique example of what a people can do in the might of its faith. When we come to the New Testament we shall see how great a part the Messianic expectations played in the rise of Christianity. And since none of the prophets equals Isaiah in describing the future prince,³ his words upon this subject give him yet another claim to a place of honour amongst Israel's prophets.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ISAIAH IN THE REIGN OF AHAZ.

2 KINGS XVI. 10—20; * ISAIAH VII.—IX. 16.

WERE we to accept the judgment of the Chronicler we should have to regard Ahaz as one of the most godless kings that Judah ever had. According to this writer he had only himself to blame for the fearful blows which Rezin and Pekah inflicted upon him; for he had made images of Baal, had sacrificed his sons, and had burned incense on the *bamahs*. Accordingly, when the Ephraimites had taken two hundred thousand women and children captive to Samaria, the prophet Obed reminded them of the sins of Ahab,

¹ John i. 41, iv. 25.

² See Vol. II., p. 264.

³ See chapter xxvii. of this volume.

⁴ 2 Chronicles xxviii.

informed them that they were only Yahweh's instruments, and that the cruelty with which they had executed his punishments upon their brothers cried to heaven for vengeance. How could they, who had sinned so deeply against Yahweh themselves, dare to oppress the Judæans! The Ephraimites gave heed to his words, clothed those of their captives who were naked, fed those who were hungry, set the weak ones upon beasts and sent them all back to Jericho. This disastrous war with Rezin and Pekah, as well as the defeats inflicted by the Edomites and Philistines, were all brought upon the Judæans by the sins into which Ahaz had allured them. When reduced to extremities, he made matters even worse by sacrificing to the gods of the Syrians, plundering the temple, setting up altars in every corner of Jerusalem, and making *bamahs* for other gods in every city of Judah. On account of all this his body was not laid amongst the royal graves.—This flood of vituperation represents Ahaz as having deliberately set to work to commit every possible kind of idolatry and other wickedness! He is even made responsible for the altars that stood in every corner of his capital, and the *bamahs* in all the cities of Judah, as though they had not been in existence long before he was born!

Even the writer of Kings, though more moderate and discriminating in his condemnation, regards Ahaz with anything but favour. He accuses him in very general terms of doing as the kings of Israel did; but the only fact which he alleges is that he sacrificed his son. As to the place and method of this deed, we shall speak presently.¹ The deed itself appears to us frightful beyond measure; but we already know enough of the ancient Israelitish forms of worship to understand that it does not really argue such depravity as at first sight appears, especially if we suppose that it was done when Ahaz was hard pressed by Syria and Israel. In that

¹ See chapter xxviii.

case it evinces his conviction that the deity was strong enough to rescue him, but must be compelled to exert himself on his behalf by some very precious offering.

The writer of Kings informs us further, at some length, that when Damascus was taken, and Ahaz went there to pay his homage to his deliverer, the king of Assyria, he saw a certain altar in the city which pleased him so much that he sent a model of it to Uriah, the chief priest of Yahweh, with orders to build one like it for the temple of Jerusalem. When this new brazen altar was built, the king himself sacrificed upon it, and assigned another place to the former altar of burnt offerings. Surely this was no such dreadful sin! Doubtless, old-fashioned people were offended by the novelty; but the artistic prince certainly never intended it as an insult to Yahweh! Had he done so, the chief priest himself would hardly have fallen in so readily with the scheme, for, of course, he was always anxious to increase the glory of his temple. For Ahaz to desire a separate altar, on which to offer sacrifices himself, was no doubt an abomination in the eyes of the later Jews, but was a proof of religious zeal rather than the contrary at the time.

As for the king's plundering the temple treasure, and even robbing the sanctuary of many of its ornaments, it, doubtless, cost him a bitter pang to do so; but he had no other means of satisfying the king of Assyria. Hezekiah himself had recourse to the same expedient afterwards.¹

We have no sufficient reason, then, to pass any very severe sentence upon Ahab; but neither have we any ground for esteeming him highly. He seems to have been a man of little force of character; good enough for an Isaiah always to keep upon good terms with him; but not in the least capable of following out the precepts of this prophet, and trusting without reserve in Yahweh.

¹ 2 Kings xviii. 15, 16.

Once when Judah was completely overrun by the Syrians and Israelites, and the king with all his people trembled "as the trees of the forest tremble before the wind," Isaiah went, at Yahweh's command, to meet Ahaz by the Fullers' Field at Jerusalem. The prophet was accompanied by one of his sons whom he had called Shear-Jashub, that is, *the remnant repents*, to signify the future repentance for which he looked as the glorious fruit of the national suffering, and the pledge of Judah's blessedness. Accompanied, then, by his son, the prophet met Ahaz and addressed him thus: "Take heed and be quiet! Fear not before these two stumps of smoking torches! For what is the burning wrath of Rezin and the son of Remaliah more? They have planned dread deeds, but Yahweh declares that they shall come to nought, and all things shall remain as they are now: Rezin, the king of Syria in Damascus, and Remaliah's son in Samaria, the capital of Ephraim. But if you confide not, then you abide not! Would you have some sign on which your faith may lean? Ask, then, for what you will, in proof that Yahweh will help you. Be it from the shadow-land or be it from the heavens, choose what you will." But Ahaz was too much depressed to be inspirited by the prophet's words; so he refused to ask a sign, and said, "I will not put Yahweh to the test." Upon this Isaiah cried, "Then listen, house of David! Is it too little for you to weary the prophets? Must you also weary my god? Then the Lord himself will give you a sign. See, there is a woman! She is with child and will bear a son. Call him Immanuel (that is *God-with-us*), for though he must live upon herdsman's fare, upon milk and honey, till he know the difference between good and evil, yet before that time has come the land before whose two kings you tremble shall already be a desert. But then shall days begin to break upon you and upon your people, and upon your father's house, such as have not been

known for misery since the time when Ephraim parted from Judah. Yahweh will call for flies from the streams of Egypt, and for wasps from Assyria, and they will creep in everywhere. The land will be shorn bare with a razor from beyond Euphrates. Then a shepherd will be left here and there, with nothing but a cow and a couple of sheep, and will have cream enough to eat, but will have nothing else save honey; for the richest vineyards will be covered with thorns and thistles, and none but the hunter will pass through the land, and all will be desolate!"

This discourse of Isaiah's¹ has always attracted the special attention of commentators, because of the use which was made by the early Christians of an expression that occurs in it.² They regarded the books of the Old Testament as sources of information concerning the circumstances of the life of Jesus;³ and in this passage which was mis-translated: "Behold! a *virgin* conceives and brings forth a son," they discovered the announcement that the Messiah would have no earthly father.⁴ Anyone who reads the discourse right through will see that it refers to nothing of the kind. In the first place, there is not a word about a virgin or a miraculous conception; and, in the next place, what Isaiah does say has no reference to a distant future. It is perfectly clear what he predicts, namely, that in a few years—before a child, as yet unborn, could tell the difference between good and evil—the land of Rezin and Pekah should be deserted, and Judah should be rid of them for good; but this would not be the end of Judah's woe. On the contrary, Yahweh would then begin to break the people almost utterly by other powers of destruction, "flies from Egypt and wasps from Assyria," and "a great razor from beyond Euphrates." Here the prophet breaks off on this occasion; but his con-

¹ Isaiah vii.² v. 14.³ Compare Vol. V., pp. 46–49.⁴ Compare Vol. V., pp. 50–52.

viction that Judah would rise again from the jaws of death, and his belief as to the means by which this result would be brought about, were sufficiently well known to all his hearers, and were announced to them by the symbolic names God-with-us and The-remnant-repents.

The ancient men of God could no more predict the future than we can. Sometimes they made a fortunate surmise, because they had formed a truer estimate of the circumstances of their people than others had; but they could not foresee particular events. This very prediction of Isaiah's illustrates the fact. He did not utter it as the result of mature deliberation and political forecasting, but was simply convinced that Yahweh would smite Rezin and Pekah because they intended to supersede his beloved house of David by another; and that he would shave Judah bare, because it was godless. He clothed this expectation under the form that we have just seen: Rezin and Pekah, whom he contemptuously describes as smoking stumps of torches that have ceased to burn, would soon retire from Judah, and their countries would be utterly devastated by Assyria. Then Judah itself would become the scene of a deadly conflict between Egypt and Assyria, from both of which it would suffer fearfully. Agriculture would be brought to a standstill, and only flocks and herds would be pastured on the untilled land.— Only a portion of these expectations were realised. Within the time assigned by Isaiah, Rezin and Pekah had indeed retired, and Damascus had fallen into the hands of Assyria, but Samaria remained independent for about twenty years, and neither the Assyrian nor the Egyptian army entered Judah. Nor had Isaiah at all foreseen that Ahaz would voluntarily place himself under Assyria's protection; or if any such step had occurred to him as possible, it was one of the very things he desired to avert by inspiring the king with courage. But Isaiah was not in the least abashed by the

non-fulfilment of his predictions, for they retained their full force, and he foretold the chastisement of Judah still, though now under slightly different forms.

But the later Jews misconceived the value of these oracles. In reality they bear witness to the faith of the prophets, and express their intense belief in Yahweh's avenging justice and his love for Israel, together with their indignation at the people's sins and their confidence in its finally repenting and being blessed by Yahweh; but instead of accepting and esteeming them for what they really were, the later Jews employed them as proofs of Yahweh's foreknowledge; and it was in this character that they collected and preserved them. We need not wonder, then, that from time to time these notions exercised a certain influence upon the text itself, and induced the collectors to make alterations, sometimes of more and sometimes of less importance, and, above all, to introduce explanations of the words of the prophet here and there, which were sometimes correct and sometimes mistaken.¹ A few illustrations of this process may be found in the discourse we are now considering; for when Isaiah declares that the plans of Rezin and Pekah will come to nothing, the collector of his prophecies inserts the prediction² that Ephraim will be entirely broken within five and sixty years, a prediction which is altogether out of place, and comes in very oddly just before the announcement that the countries of the two monarchs will be depopulated within a few years. Moreover, twice in this passage and once in a prophecy which we shall consider presently,³ the king of Assyria is expressly indicated as the future devastator of Judah. This and other such announcements might easily be put into Isaiah's mouth by the later but the prophet himself had no knowledge of the of the future.

¹ Compare pp. 140, 156, 157.

² Fe. 2.

³ Isaiah viii. 76.

"Trust in Yahweh!" This was Isaiah's one and only answer to the question, "What is to be done?" which Ahaz, his advisers, and every thoughtful Judæan were asking with ever-growing apprehension. It was clear that Judah could not hold her own against Syria and Israel. All the conquests of Uzziah and Jotham were already wrenched from the hand of Ahaz. Elath was in Rezin's power. The Philistines had recovered their independence. All idea of keeping possession of the eastern provinces of Ammon and Moab was abandoned. The Edomites had doubtless not only put a garrison in Elath, but established their power in southern Judah, where the Kenites, who had always been their friends,¹ were settled. The rest of Judah was being conquered piece by piece, and siege was laid to Jerusalem itself. "Hope in the help of Yahweh! Repent! If ye confide not, then ye abide not!" was still Isaiah's cry; but it was both natural and right for Ahaz and his advisers to look round for some human means of deliverance.

They were not all agreed. While many a Judæan witnessed the success of Rezin's and Pekah's arms with secret satisfaction, the partizans of Ahaz looked abroad for help. Many turned their eyes to Egypt; but public opinion and the king's own inclinations began to incline more and more decidedly to the plan of calling in the Assyrians. Against this project Isaiah raised his voice, for he expected nothing but misery to come of it.²

One day the people noticed a great board before his house with the words "Keen for booty, swift to spoil" upon it. Their curiosity was stirred, and they asked what the strange inscription meant, upon which Isaiah called two citizens, whom everyone respected, and whose witness everyone would accept, namely, the priest Uriah and Zachariah the son of Berechiah, and explained to them the meaning of the enig-

¹ See p. 271.

² Isaiah viii. 1—ix. 6.

matical inscription, that they might afterwards bear witness to the truth of his anticipations. Some time afterwards his wife bore him a son, and at Yahweh's command he called him Keen-for-booty-swift-to-spoil; "for," as he now declared, in explanation of his meaning, "before this child can say 'father,' or 'mother,' the treasures of Damascus and the booty of Samaria shall be brought to Assyria's king."

And these are the words he addressed to the citizens of Jerusalem:—

"Because this people despises the soft-flowing waters of Siloah, and delights in Rezin and Pekah, therefore the Lord shall bring over them the great and mighty waves of Euphrates. The river shall mount over all its channels, overflow its banks upon every side; strike into Judah, overflowing and rolling, reaching to the neck; spread over all the breadth of land;—but God is with us!"

"Rejoice, ye nations, and tremble! Listen, all ye ends of the earth! Equip yourselves and tremble! Yea, equip yourselves and tremble! Form a plan, and it will come to nothing. Make a project, and it will fail. For God is with us. When Yahweh laid his hand upon me and instructed me, he warned me not to accord with this people. Take not to heart, he said to me, what this people takes to heart; be not afraid of what they fear. Yahweh of war-hosts, him shall you hallow; let him be your fear and your terror! For he is a sanctuary that none may violate; a stone of offence and a rock of stumbling for either house of Israel; a snare and a net for Jerusalem's people. Full many of them shall stumble and fall and be crushed to pieces; shall run into the snare and be taken."

"Close the testimony as to the meaning of the inscription, seal it with the help of the faithful Uriah and Zachariah. I wait for Yahweh, though now he hides his face from the house of Jacob. I hope in him; and I and my children, The-

remnant-repents and Keen-for-booty-swift-to-spoil, are signs in Israel, given by Yahweh, who dwells in Sion. And when they say to you, 'Consult the shades and the soothsayers, who mutter and whisper their magic charms'—what! must not a people consult its god? Must it not seek refuge with the living rather than with the dead? 'Go to the teaching and the witness which the prophets give!' Unless they who now sit in utter darkness come to speak words like these, then they shall wander about in the land sorely oppressed and, hungering, and when they are hungry they shall wax wrath and curse their king and their god; and whithersoever they turn, above or below, there shall be distress and darkness; they shall be cast down into troublous gloom and blackness."

"But they who are now afflicted shall not remain in darkness. The people that now walks in gloom shall see a glorious light; the dwellers in the land of night shall see the gleaming dawn. Thou, Yahweh! spreadest them out again; thou givest them joy to taste, as in the time of harvest, or the day when the spoil is divided. For thou wilt break his yoke, and the staff with which he is driven, as when Midian was smitten.¹ And the clanking armour, and warrior's mantle stained with blood, all shall be burned and shall be a prey to the flames. For a child is born to us, a son is given us; dominion shall be laid upon his shoulders, and men shall call him Wonder-of-wisdom, Might-of-god, Booty-seizer,² Prince of Peace. Without bounds shall his dominion extend, and endless weal shall it confer on David's throne and all the kingdom. This throne shall he raise up and strengthen, by justice and by right henceforth for ever. The zeal of Yahweh of war-hosts will perform all this."

In one point the editor who adopted this oracle as part of his collection failed to understand it. The afflicted people to whom Isaiah promised deliverance were the Judæans whom

¹ See Vol. II., p. 193.

² After an amended version.

Rezin and Pekah were now harassing, and whom Ashur was soon to overflow like a mighty river. But the editor supposed the prophet only had in view the districts conquered by Tiglath-Pilezer, so he added to the promise, "the people now afflicted shall not always remain in darkness," the following words by way of explanation:¹ "As Yahweh rejected the land of Zebulon and Naphtali at first, so shall he bring it back at last to honour, the sea coast and the district east of Jordan and the heathen march." This makes the whole passage obscure; for since the seer here foretells, as something future, the conquest of Damascus, as well as that of Samaria,² the discourse cannot have been uttered when Damascus was already in the hands of the Assyrians and Rezin had fallen. It may indeed have been Isaiah himself, and not his editor, who afterwards, in writing down the record of his preaching, inserted this reference to the districts that the Assyrians had harassed and subdued; but this is practically the same thing, for the essential point is that these words were not part of the original oracle.

It deserves remark that just when things appeared to be at the worst, when the king, reduced to desperation, was on the point of throwing himself into the arms of Assyria, Isaiah prophesied that after many miseries a glorious day should break for Judah, a day when the driver's staff should be broken and a scion of David's house, who was now new-born, should rule over Israel. It is easy to see how such anticipations, caught up and adopted by weak and shallow minds, might nourish gross fanaticism. The sequel of the history will show it but too clearly. But in so deep a moral nature as Isaiah's, the only fruits they could produce were increased intensity of effort, cheerfulness in suffering, and scrupulous obedience to the commands of Yahweh.

¹ Isaiah ix. 1.

² Isaiah viii. 4.

CHAPTER XXV.

IMAGE-WORSHIP CONDEMNED.

Exodus XXIV. 3-8, 12-18, XXXI. 18-XXXIII. 6, XXIII. 12-XXXIV. 35.

WHEN any special form of religion, in which there is real life and capacity for progress, has been established for some considerable time, many of those who profess it must inevitably begin to outgrow the forms, the usages, and the doctrines which have been handed down to them by their fathers; and since the great mass of the worshippers do not keep pace with them, but obstinately cling to the primeval usages of their religion, complications are sure to arise which will demand a more or less violent solution. So it was in Israel. The worship of Yahweh included the use of a number of objects, such as anointed stones, pillars, images of the sun, *teraphim*, altars, the ark, together with institutions common to all manner of religions, such as sacrifices, purifications, and the observance of holy days. This had been so from the first. Moses and his contemporaries would certainly have been unable to imagine any worship of the deity without these forms; and the Mosaic school, in the succeeding centuries, insisted on the observance of Yahweh's moral commandments without declaring war upon these elements of his worship or proclaiming their worthlessness. But gradually a change took place. The noblest sons of Israel and Judah became more and more clearly conscious of the chasm which separated their religion from that of their neighbours, or, to use their own expression, which separated Yahweh from the other gods; and the more they dwelt upon the moral requirements of their god, the more clearly did they see how useless and even pernicious the

usual religious practices were ; for the outward resemblance between the worship of Yahweh and that of all kinds of Baals often prevented the worshippers of Israel's god from keeping his moral precepts in view.

These reformers were naturally most offended by the images of Yahweh, for they fostered a narrow conception of his nature, which was utterly inconsistent with the lofty thoughts which they themselves cherished concerning the god of gods. Even in the northern kingdom, where the images were a part of the state religion, powerful voices had been raised against them ; and had the kingdom remained a little longer in existence, it is probable that the gilt bulls of Dan and Bethel would soon have fallen under the sturdy strokes which the prophets dealt them, just as Baal had already done.¹ How much more intense must the horror of all image-worship have been in the southern kingdom, the principal sanctuary of which, at any rate, had always remained free from the stain ! It is only natural, again, that the miserable condition of Israel after Jeroboam's death, its humiliation in the time of Menahem, and its final collapse under Hosea, should have made a deep impression upon the Mosaic school in Judah. Why has the people of Yahweh fallen ? they asked. And the only answer they could give was that Yahweh had renounced it because of its sins, and especially its image worship, its bowing down before the abominations of Dan and Bethel !

This conviction found expression in the story of Israel's sin in the desert, which we will now consider. The exact date of its composition we cannot determine ; but it is probable that, while building upon a comparatively ancient legend, the writer of this particular story did not live earlier than in the troubled times of Menahem, or later than the first years after the fall of Samaria. The story is affixed to

¹ See p. 321.

that portion of the legend of Yahweh's appearance to the Israelites at Mount Sinai which represents the people as fleeing in terror from the consuming fire and trembling for fear.¹

When the people whom Yahweh had borne out of Egypt, as on the wings of an eagle, and chosen for his special possession, had entreated Moses to protect them henceforth from immediate revelations from the deity, and to convey his commands to them himself, Moses went up into the darkness where Yahweh dwelt.

He soon returned to the Israelites and told them all the words of Yahweh.² In the first place they must never make themselves any gold or silver images of gods, and must offer all their sacrifices upon simple altars of earth; it did not matter where, for Yahweh would come to them and bless them wherever they worshipped him. If they were determined to make a stone altar, they must build it of rough and unhewn stones, for as soon as it was touched by a chisel it was desecrated; and in no case must it be so high that it had to be ascended by steps. Yahweh, on his side, would send his angel before them to the promised land. To this angel they must give good heed, for since the name of Yahweh was in him, and he was the representative of this stern god, he would not overlook their sins. But if they were obedient to him he would bring them into the land of the Canaanites; and when they got there they must beware of falling into the idolatry of the inhabitants, but must rather break their *massebahs* to pieces and serve Yahweh only. Then he would bless them with health and prosperity; and if he did not drive out all the Canaanites at once it was for fear the beasts of prey should multiply too fast, but he would gradually drive them out till Israel's territory extended from the Red

¹ See Vol. II., p. 75.

² Exodus xx. 22-26, xxiii. 20-33.

Sea to the Mediterranean, from the desert to the Euphrates. But above all things they must beware of idolatry.

Upon this the Israelites unanimously promised to keep the commandments of Yahweh, and Moses made the necessary preparations for concluding a solemn covenant between the people and their god. With this purpose he wrote down in a book all that Yahweh had said to him and all that the people had agreed to, and then built an altar at the foot of the mountain, surrounded by twelve *massebahs* in accordance with the number of the tribes. Then he ordered some of the younger Israelites to sacrifice oxen to Yahweh, caught the blood in basins and poured half of it out at the foot of the altar, to signify that Yahweh, on his part, pledged himself to protect and bless the Israelites as his chosen people. Then Moses read the book, in which Yahweh's commands were written, aloud to the people, and they promised with one voice to obey it faithfully, whereupon he sprinkled them with the rest of the blood, exclaiming as he did so, "This is the blood of the covenant which Yahweh makes with you on the conditions to which you have sworn!"

When Israel had thus become the people of Yahweh, Moses once more ascended Mount Sinai at the divine command to receive the stone tablets of the Law, together with other precepts which Yahweh himself had written down for his people. Moses was accompanied by Joshua, while Aaron and Hur took his place as heads of the people. Yahweh's cloud enveloped the mountain when Moses had ascended it, and it was seven days before the deity summoned him into his presence. Then the sons of Israel beheld the glory of Yahweh on the summit, like to a burning fire, and Moses remained forty days and forty nights upon the mountain.

At last the Israelites lost patience and were so tired of waiting that they went one day to Aaron and said, "Come! make us a god that we can see going out before us, for we

cannot tell what has become of this Moses who brought us out of Egypt." Aaron had not the courage flatly to refuse their request, but as he was very unwilling to comply with it, he tried to turn them aside from their purpose by declaring that he should require all the golden ornaments of their wives and daughters. But it appeared that they were more in earnest than he had supposed, for they cheerfully brought him the necessary amount of gold, and he had now hardly any choice but to comply with their wish by making them a gilt image of a bull. Then the people shouted, "There is your god, O Israel! which brought you out of Egypt!" And Aaron built an altar before the image, and appointed the next day for a festival to Yahweh. So when morning broke the feast was celebrated. All manner of sacrifices were performed, jovial banquets were held, and finally the festive dance began.

But at this very moment Moses came down again from the mountain with the two tablets of stone, written in two columns and upon both sides by Yahweh's own finger. Joshua, who still accompanied him, was the first to hear the noise that rose from the camp below. "I hear the sound of battle!" he exclaimed; but Moses answered, "It is not the shout of the victor; it is not the groan of the vanquished, but the sound of a festive song that I hear!" When they drew nearer they perceived only too clearly that Moses was right. There stood the image of the bull, with the Israelites dancing and singing round it! At this sight Moses could no longer command his emotion, and, in a burst of indignant grief and anger, he dashed the stone tablets to the ground and broke them to pieces. Then he burst into the camp amid the cowed and terror-stricken Israelites, seized their image, burned it to cinders, ground it to dust, and scattered it upon the water they drank. Now, let them swallow their mighty god! Then Aaron had to answer for

his conduct. "Why!" he stammered, "you know how headstrong these people are. Well, they came to me and said: 'Give us a god that we can see; for, as for this Moses, we cannot tell where he has gone to!'—So then I told them they must give me all their golden ornaments, and when they brought them I threw them into the fire; and then . . . well, this bull came out!"

The answer which Moses gave to this lame and shuffling excuse has not been preserved, for some later writer has inserted a passage, which we shall consider presently, in its place; but no doubt it contained a severe and merited rebuke.¹ Before long, however, his faithful love for his people triumphed in the heart of Moses over every other feeling, and the very next day he said to them: "You have sinned most grievously; but I will go up to the mountain again and pray to Yahweh; perhaps I can still find means of atoning for your trespass."

So Moses went back to Yahweh and prayed: "Alas! this people has sinned grievously in making gods of gold. But now forgive this trespass; and, if thou canst not forgive it, except some sacrifice be made, then blot me out of thy book." But Yahweh said in answer to this prayer of love: "Him only who has sinned will I blot out of my book. Now go, and lead this people to the promised land; and my angel will go out before them. But when I come and visit them, I will exact requital of them for their sins." So Yahweh smote that people for the golden bull which they had caused Aaron to make.

There are several points in this story which will repay our closer attention.

In the first place, let us consider the scene in which the sacrifice of the covenant is offered. The thought embodied

¹ Compare Deuteronomy ix. 20.

in it is the same that Hosea expresses under the image of the marriage of Yahweh and his people. Yahweh is the god of gods, and has chosen Israel out of all the nations to enter into a close alliance with him. He will defend and bless his people if they, on their side, will observe the precepts of their god. This covenant is the central thought of Israel's religion from the eighth century B.C. onwards; and accordingly, when the Christian religion had risen up by the side of that of the Jews, the former was called the new covenant, and the latter the old covenant. These names were afterwards transferred to the written documents of the two religions.—The names, Old and New Testament, have risen out of a curious misunderstanding. It happens that in Greek the same word signifies "covenant" and "last will and testament;" and the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews enters into an argument which turns entirely upon a play on the two meanings of this word, and is hardly intelligible in a translation.¹ It is from this passage that the names of Old and New Testament are derived.

We shall repeatedly see from the sequel of the history that this conception of Israel, as God's covenanted people, bore the most salutary fruits on the one hand in quickening the people's sense of dignity, and stimulating them to reject the Canaanitish usages and everything coarse and low; but, on the other hand, produced disastrous results in exaggerated national pride, and a spirit of cold and mercenary service.

The other leading thought of our story is: The chosen people has fallen away from its god; or, as Hosea expressed it, Yahweh's wife is an adulteress. The guilt of this apostasy falls chiefly on the people themselves, but Aaron is also deeply involved in the sin, and incurs the wrath of Yahweh in no small degree. The part which the legend has assigned to this brother of Moses is very perplexing, and cannot be

¹ Hebrews ix. 15 ff.

explained with any certainty; but it seems probable that it originated thus: When the Mosaic school began to feel that the bull worship was inconsistent with the conception they had formed of Yahweh, but had not yet conceived the utter abhorrence of it which characterised them afterwards, they attempted to palliate the ancient custom, which they despaired of rooting out, and to find a place for it within the circle of Mosaic traditions¹ by assigning its institution to Aaron, and probably explaining that it had some special purpose at the time and was expressly sanctioned by Yahweh. We shall see in the next chapter that a precisely similar use was made of the name of Moses in connection with the quite equally idolatrous worship of the brazen serpent. After a time, however, the Mosaic school came to hate the image-worship so intensely that they could no longer accept this compromise, and since Aaron's name was now firmly established in connection with this worship, he, too, came in for a share of the guilt and shame attaching to it. So the legend assumed an entirely new form, and it is in this later version that we still possess it. Aaron had indeed set up the first golden bull, but not at the command of Yahweh. It was a weak and culpable indulgence of the evil desires of the people, during the absence of Moses; Aaron himself was ashamed of what he did, and had hardly a word to say to Moses when he returned; and Yahweh was very angry with him.—But in the course of time Aaron, as we shall see, came to be regarded as the representative of the priestly order, and the part he played in the legend must have shocked and scandalized the priests of a later date beyond all measure. Accordingly a certain writer of strong Levitical sympathies did what he could to mend matters by leaving out the rebuke of Aaron, and so letting it be understood that Moses accepted his excuse, and then substituting the following passage,² which

Compare Vol. I., pp. 134—138, 228—231.

¹ Exodus xxxii. 25—29.

now appears, awkwardly enough, between Aaron's answer and the return of Moses to intercede with Yahweh :—

When Moses saw that the people had broken through every restraint, and had become the laughing-stock of their enemies, he stood at the gate of the camp and cried : "Whoever is on Yahweh's side, let him come to me !" Then all the Levites came and ranged themselves round him, and he cried to them : "Thus says Yahweh, the god of Israel: Gird on your swords and go up and down the camp, slaying everyone you meet, though it were your own brother, your friend, or your next of kin." The Levites obeyed, and about three thousand of the Israelites were slain. Then Moses said : "Now bring your sacrifice of consecration ; for you, who have spared neither son nor brother,¹ are worthy priests of Yahweh !"

The interpolation is clumsy enough from an artistic and literary point of view ; but one can hardly help admiring the bold stroke by which the writer turned the story completely round, and made the event, which appeared to reflect such disgrace upon the priests, the very occasion of Yahweh's consecrating them to himself ; and that, too, not by arbitrary selection, but as a reward for their virtue in upholding his honour and attacking the worship of the bulls !

The part assigned to Aaron in the legend, then, is anything but creditable to him ; but that of Moses, the mediator between Yahweh and the people, commands unmingled admiration. Even in the story as we have given it, he is represented as interceding for his people with his god ; but in Exodus this point is insisted upon at still greater length, for there² we are informed that when the forty days were over and Moses was on the point of descending the mountain,

¹ Compare Deuteronomy xxxiii. 8—10. See p. 251.

² Exodus xxxii. 7—14.

Yahweh told him how Israel had sinned in making the golden image of a bull. Yahweh declared further that the people were incorrigible, and that if Moses would but let him have his way, he would utterly destroy them, and would make the posterity of Moses himself a mighty nation. But Moses tried to soothe his wrath: "O Yahweh! why shouldst thou do so? See! thou hast shown thy might by rescuing this people out of Egypt; and now wilt thou let the Egyptians say: He only led them out from here to slay them in the mountains and utterly destroy them?¹ Ah Lord! be gracious to this people once again. Consider thy promises to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob." Upon this Yahweh repented of the fearful threats which he had launched against the people.

This passage is certainly a later addition, for it is strangely out of keeping with the very next scene in which Moses, as he talks with Joshua, has to gather from the sound that rises from the camp what it is that is there going on; while the closing scene, in which Moses returns to Yahweh to implore him to forgive the people, is still more incongruous with this interpolated passage, which would make it a simple repetition of what had been done already.

The object of the insertion is evidently to bring out still more clearly than was done in the old legend the power of the intercessory prayer of Moses, and thus to glorify the great messenger of Yahweh, by whom all the laws of Israel were supposed to have been given. The same purpose runs through the sequel of our story, which consists of various elements which it is exceedingly difficult to separate, and which are all identical in spirit. Their contents are as follows:—

Yahweh said to Moses again: "Take this people to Canaan. And I, for my part, will send my angel to drive out the inhabitants, but I will not go with them myself, for

¹ Compare Numbers xiv. 15, 16.

they are a stiff-necked people, and perhaps I should destroy them on the way." In mourning over these hard words, the sons of Israel set aside all their ornaments, whereupon Yahweh said again: "Yes, you are a stiff-necked people, and if I were to dwell amongst you, I should destroy you in a moment; but now remain in mourning garments, unadorned, till I make known my will to you."

After a time Moses said to Yahweh: "Lord! thou hast told me to lead this people on, but hast not declared who will go with me; and yet thou hast said that thou dost know me through and through and delightest in me! If this be so indeed, then let me know thy will, and remember that Israel is thy people!" And Yahweh answered, "Must I myself go with you, then, and bring you to the place of rest?" "Yes, Lord!" replied the shepherd of Israel, "for if you go not with us, it were better that we did not go at all! How are we to know that we, this people and I, are really loved by you, unless you go with us, and so distinguish us above all peoples?" "Since I take pleasure in you," answered Yahweh, "I will grant you this request likewise." Then the favoured mortal uttered one more prayer, though half in fear, "Show me thy full glory!" But Yahweh answered his rash words: "It may not be! I will indeed pass by you in all my majesty and will utter the name of Yahweh as I go, for I will show favour to those I love; but you may not look upon my face. No mortal could behold it and yet live!—Here," continued Yahweh, "is a place on a rock hard by, where you must take your stand. When I am going to pass by you, I will place you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover your eyes with my own hand, that your life may be preserved; and, as soon as I have passed, I will take away my hand, so that you can see me from behind, but my countenance you must not see!"

With this Moses must be content. At the divine com-

mand he took two new tablets of stone and ascended the mountain, upon which no human foot must tread while he was there; nor must the very cattle be so much as allowed to graze over against it. Then, when Yahweh came down in his pillar of cloud, Moses adored him, and heard the deity pass by, as he had said, with the words: "I am Yahweh, a merciful and gracious god, very long-suffering, and faithful. I reward those that I love to a thousand generations, forgive their sins, their iniquities, and their offences; but I hold not him that trespasses guiltless, and I visit the father's misdeeds on the children and children's children to the third and fourth generation!" When he heard these words Moses bowed down and repeated his request once more: "If thou delightest in me, Lord! then do thou go with us; and though this people be so stubborn, yet do thou forgive their sin!" Yahweh graciously accepted his prayer, and promised to protect Israel; but he repeated some of his principal commandments, amongst which the avoidance of idolatry and all intermixture with the Canaanites were foremost, while the observance of the sabbath, the celebration of three yearly feasts in honour of Yahweh, and the making of rich offerings, were also strongly insisted on.

Moses remained forty days and nights upon the mountain, without either eating or drinking, received many more instructions there, and wrote the Ten Commandments again upon the tablets of stone. Since he had been so long in the neighbourhood of Yahweh, his face shone so brightly when he returned that Aaron and the people entreated him to cover it with a veil, for they were afraid of approaching him. Ever afterwards he wore a veil when he spoke to them, and only put it away when he held converse with Yahweh.

To see God is death! Such was the faith of the Israelites from the eighth century onwards, when they had learned to think of Yahweh as a being too exalted for men to hold

familiar intercourse with him, as the old legends about Moses and others represented them as doing.¹ To see God is death ! so said all ancient peoples in whose conceptions of the deity was any touch of sublimity. To see God is death ! was a thought most natural to those who felt their own littleness, and imagined themselves in the presence of the fearful God, who reveals his power in the dread phenomena of nature, who can kill and make alive. To see God is death ! is a thought which even wakes an echo in the heart of him who sees in God the power of moral Holiness above all else, for to him too, as long as he does not obey His will with all his heart, God may reveal himself as the consuming fire, as a being who condemns and punishes.² To see God is death ! is a thought that fades only from the heart of the Christian who worships in the Holy One the Everlasting Love, and knows that his commands can bring him blessing only. Jesus could say : " Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God ; " but ancient Israel was still far removed from such a thought.

A covenant in which the duties and privileges of the two parties are defined, leaves room for a mediator who prevents any small transgression on the one side from involving the utter discarding of the covenant on the other. Such a mediator is Moses, whose noble generosity and love, as he throws himself into the breach for his people, are finely sketched in the legend.

But the office of mediator between the Israelites and Yahweh fell for the most part to the priests. Though a prophet might on special occasions pray for his people, yet his peculiar office was to convey to them the commands, the warnings, threats and promises of Yahweh. A priest might sometimes

¹ See Vol. II., pp. 76 ff.

² See Vol. I., p. 162.

give instruction, but his proper task was to appease the wrath of Yahweh and make good the people's sins by sacrifices and purifications. The very teaching that he gave was directed to the same object ; for it referred to the difference between cleanness and uncleanness, to sacrifices and tithes, to the celebration of feasts and the observance of the sabbath, in a word, to the external commandments of Yahweh, to his ritual, and not to the moral life of man. If the prophet was Yahweh's messenger to Israel, the Levitical priest was Israel's mediator with Yahweh.

In the narrative we have been considering, if it is really a single whole, the priestly and prophetic elements are intimately blended. On the one hand all the precepts it contains refer to the so-called religious duties, such as renouncing images and elaborate altars, destroying the sacred objects of the Canaanites, observing the sabbath and other festivals, making sacrifices and presenting and redeeming first-fruits and firstlings. In marked contrast to the ancient book of law,¹ which a later editor inserted here, on occasion of the conclusion of the covenant, the legend itself does not contain a single moral precept. But on the other hand there is the very soul of all morality in the noble self-abandonment of Moses for his people's sake. This is worth more than any code of moral laws, and reminds us that after all the best of the Israelites valued the special rites of Yahweh and condemned those of other deities chiefly because the former were associated with a higher and the latter with a lower grade of moral culture.²

Nevertheless we may already trace the danger of which we spoke when recounting the fall of northern Israel—the danger of the Mosaic school in Judah falling into the priestly groove, attaching undue weight to forms and cere-

¹ Exodus xxi.—xxiii. 19. See pp. 238 ff.

² Compare pp. 347, 348.

monies, and, under the guidance of the powerful Levitical priesthood of Jerusalem, attacking idolatry more vigorously than immorality.

But be the faults or merits of this party what they may, we are now to witness its first great victory.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HEZEKIAH'S REFORMATION.

2 KINGS XVIII. 1-8.¹

AHAZ reigned for sixteen years, and was then succeeded by his son Hezekiah, who was five and twenty years old, and who reigned twenty-nine years.

Three years after Hezekiah's accession, Hosea, king of Israel, threw off his allegiance to Shalmaneser, who soon afterwards laid siege to Samaria. Hezekiah was not wanting in courage, and had already done something towards strengthening the country; but he dared not defy the Assyrians, so he remained Shalmaneser's vassal, and left Hosea to his fate, as the king of Egypt also did.

The sternest of Yahweh's prophets did not fail to foretell Samaria's fall. It was situated on a hill that overlooked a fruitful valley, and Isaiah compared it to a splendid wreath of flowers, such as those with which the guests at a great banquet crowned themselves, especially when they were drunk; but the flowers of the wreath, he said, had now begun to fade.² The capital of Ephraim would be like a fig that has ripened before harvest time. Some passer-by observes it, holds it for a moment in his hand, and then eats it up. He found a peculiar appropriateness in the comparison of Samaria to the wreath of flowers on the brow of

¹ 2 Chronicles xxix-xxxi.

² Isaiah xxviii.

drunken revellers, for the sin of drunkenness was universal within her walls. Judges, warriors, priests, prophets, all of them staggered with strong drink. They tottered even as they gave their oracles or pronounced their sentences; and they even dared to make merry over the number of Yahweh's commandments. Woe to them!—But neither did the preacher of repentance spare Jerusalem. How full of pride were Judah's nobles! How they boasted of their warlike strength, as though they had made a covenant with the shadow-land, that the overflowing scourge should not reach them! "It comes and hurls you to the ground. Yahweh deals with his people as a husbandman deals with his land and its sundry produce. He does not plough his corn-land at every season of the year, nor does he always break the soil with coulter and with harrow; for, when he has made the land ready, does he not scatter it with dill and cummin, and sow the wheat in rows, the barley within the hedge and the spelt upon the border? His god has taught him to do so. Then he does not thrash his dill with an iron flail, nor roll a cart-wheel over his cummin, but he quietly strikes out the seed with a staff. But the corn is thrashed, yet not too much; cart-wheels and horses are driven over it, but not till it is crushed. This, too, is Yahweh's teaching. Wonderful is his insight, great his wisdom!"

Micah of Moresheth saw yet more clearly than Isaiah himself that Ephraim would be roughly thrashed, yet not utterly crushed, inasmuch as it was Yahweh's people; and that Judah also would incur a fearful lot. In Micah's eyes the future of both Judah and Israel was full of gloom. Samaria, the seducer of Israel, should be made a heap of ruins, she should be utterly over-turned, and all her images should be broken to pieces. But woe to Judah also! Jerusalem deserves nothing but misery, for countless are her sins. She is full of theft and usury.

Are there no prophets in her then? Ah! yes; but they prophesy lies. Men who will utter oracles for a draught of wine pass with this people for Yahweh's messengers! Woe to you, princes of Jacob, who suck the marrow of the poor! Woe to the prophets who are ever ready with a favourable response for anyone who pays the price! They shall all be covered with shame; but I am a true prophet, full of Yahweh's spirit, intent on showing Israel his sins. Listen! ye heads of Jacob, who build up Sion with the price of blood and Jerusalem with wrong! Alas! her priests give instruction for gold, and her prophets divine for gain, and yet they rely upon Yahweh and ask: "Is not Yahweh in our midst? Shall any evil overtake us?" Of a truth shall Sion be ploughed like a field, because of you, Jerusalem shall fall in ruins, and the mountain of the temple shall become a forest height.¹

In this last prediction Micah went further than any other prophet. It is true that while most of the men of god proclaimed nothing but blessings upon Yahweh's people, the most serious amongst them anticipated a heavy judgment; but that Jerusalem herself, the city of Yahweh and of his anointed, should be laid waste, it was impossible for them to believe. There is not one of Isaiah's oracles containing a prediction such as this. On the contrary, Isaiah firmly believed that Jerusalem would be spared. "Sion," says Yahweh, "I have made a stone, a tried and precious corner-stone, a firm foundation. Let not him who has faith flee away."² We shall constantly meet with this conviction elsewhere also. A century later it exercised a powerful influence upon Judah's history.

We must not suppose, however, that Micah anticipated the final ruin of Judah. Far from it! His own conviction was doubtless accurately expressed in the prediction which he

¹ Micah i.—iii.

² Isaiah xxviii. 16, after an amended version.

probably borrowed from some other prophet:¹ "At the end of the days it shall come to pass that the mount of the temple shall stand at the head of the mountains and be exalted above the hills, and all the peoples shall stream to it. Then many peoples shall set out and cry: 'Come, let us go to Yahweh's mountain, to the house of Jacob's god; let us learn his commandments and walk in the ways which he shows us!' All this shall come to pass, because instruction goes forth from Sion and Yahweh's word from Jerusalem. Then shall he utter judgment over many nations, and pronounce sentences for mighty and far distant peoples. And they shall beat their swords into scythes and their spears into sickles, nation shall no longer lift up the sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. Then shall each one sit under his vine and fig tree, and no one shall make him afraid, for the mouth of Yahweh of hosts has spoken it; since all the peoples serve their gods, and we serve Yahweh our god for ever."

This reign of bliss and glory would be inaugurated by a king of David's house.² "From thee, O race of Ephrath³ (that is to say, the stock of David), small as thou art amongst Judah's families, out of thee shall come forth one who shall rule over Israel, one whose descent is from ancient times. He shall pasture his people in Yahweh's name, his greatness shall spread to the ends of the earth, and in his time shall be peace. When the Assyrians come into the land we shall send seven shepherds to meet them; yea, we shall send eight princes, and they will pasture Assyria with the sword. Then shall the remnant of Jacob amongst the peoples be like dew upon the herbs; amongst great nations it shall be like a lion amongst the beasts of the forest, as a lion's whelp among flocks of sheep, who tramples down and tears as he passes by, and none can deliver from him."

¹ Micah iv. 1—5. Compare Isaiah ii. 2—5.

² Micah v. 2 ff.

³ After an amended version.

In lofty expectations for Israel's future glory, then, Micah yielded to none of his brethren. But he differed from them in expecting to see the fall not only of the other cities, but of the capital, the holy city itself, before deliverance should come. For, as the chief guilt of Israel fell upon Samaria, so Jerusalem had led the way for Judah in all that was wicked.¹

In his ideas of good and evil, Micah agrees perfectly with Isaiah. He inveighs with equal vehemence against cavalry and war-chariots, cities and fortresses, on the one hand, and soothsaying and magic, images, anointed stones and *asherahs*² upon the other. But he is no less indignant with dishonesty in trade, with usury and lying: for no sacrifices can please Yahweh; though a man should give his first-born son for a guilt-offering it would avail him nothing. "To do justice and to love devoutness, and to walk humbly with Yahweh"—that is what he requires.³

Such were the promises and threats of these messengers of Yahweh before the Assyrians had as yet turned their weapons against Judah; before, indeed, they had had any occasion to do so, and while Hezekiah was still their vassal. Yet the prophets could not choose but know how uneasily many of the Judæans, including the king himself, bore the yoke; and they were aware that a war with Assyria was far from improbable. In fact, the party that planned and stimulated rebellion was itself led by a number of the prophets. This was the necessary outcome of their religious beliefs. Was not Yahweh the lord of war-hosts? Could he not bring them aid? And should his people, then, bow down before the heathens, before the worshippers of idols? If Judah would but trust in her god, she would be invincible.

But before she could trust in his support she must act in

¹ Micah i. 5.

² Micah v. 10—14.

³ Micah vi. 10—12, 6—8. See Vol. I., p. 191.

accordance with his will, and that she was far from doing while she endured so many heathen practices in her midst, and above all, the worship of images. This conviction had been striking deeper and deeper root in the hearts of a section of the people; and the fall of Samaria in the sixth year of Hezekiah's reign could not fail to add great weight to their opinions. Why had Yahweh rejected Israel, if not because it worshipped golden bulls? And if Judah was to be delivered and restored to power it must cleanse itself from this same stain. Under the influence of such considerations Hezekiah took in hand the work of reformation.

We must try to form a true idea of what this reformation really was, but trustworthy accounts of it are so scanty that the task is very difficult. The Chronicler, indeed, tells us all about it in great detail; but here, as in so many other cases, he has let his imagination run completely away with him. He describes Ahaz as a desperate opponent of the worship of Yahweh, who broke the sacrificial implements in the temple to pieces, raised altars and *bamahs* everywhere, closed the doors of the temple, put out the lamps, allowed no incense to be offered, and, indeed, completely stopped the worship there; but Hezekiah was as truly religious as his father Ahaz had been heathenish. No sooner had he mounted the throne than he opened the temple doors and invited the priests and Levites to purify the sanctuary, and restore everything to order, with a view to public worship there. When this was done he had a great sin offering made for the people, paying special attention to the music.¹ The number of sacrifices offered upon this occasion was so great that the priests were not able to get through the work, and had to call in the help of the Levites, who were indeed far more zealous than the Aaronites themselves.

Then Hezekiah, the Chronicler goes on to inform us,

¹ Compare p. 13.

ordered the Passover to be held throughout Israel, in the North as well as the South. In the northern districts many of the Israelites treated his messengers with contempt, but others were moved and repented; Judah, on the other hand, was unanimous. Jerusalem was purged of all unlawful altars, and the feast of the Passover was celebrated. Many of the celebrants, indeed, especially those from northern Israel, were not ceremonially clean according to the priestly ordinances; but the king prayed Yahweh to regard the dispositions of their hearts rather than their outward cleanness, and Yahweh heard him. Such a feast had not been celebrated since the days of Solomon.

After this the reformation of the worship was carried on vigorously throughout the land, including northern Israel. All the images, *asherahs*, *bamahs*, and altars were broken down and destroyed; the people volunteered their first-fruits and tithes in such quantities that heaps of provisions were left over; for Yahweh blessed his people so richly that everything was plentiful in the extreme. Finally, to secure the orderly continuance of public worship, the king appointed Levites and priests over every branch of it. Thus he did what was right and good in the eyes of Yahweh.

What the Chronicler is really describing is the conduct which a pious prince would have adopted in the third century B.C.; but, in putting it all down to Hezekiah, he exaggerates the effects of his piety as much as he had already overdrawn the picture of the heathenish proclivities of Ahaz. We have already seen that the latter never dreamt of closing Yahweh's temple; and in like manner we must forget the whole account of Hezekiah's reformation given us by the Chronicler, if we would form an even approximately correct idea of what it really was.

The writer of Kings is far more accurate. He extols Hezekiah greatly, says that he did what was right, like his

father David; that he removed the *bamahs*, destroyed the *massebahs*, cut down the *asherahs*, and broke in pieces the brazen serpent of Moses, to which the Israelites offered incense, and which they called Serpent-god. This gives us a very fair conception of what Hezekiah's reformation was; but the account is too sweeping, and when the writer makes Hezekiah forbid the Israelites to offer sacrifices upon any altar except the one in the temple at Jerusalem,¹ it is possible enough that he is confusing his work with that of Josiah; for it is not probable that he actually went so far as this, even if he intended ultimately to do so. Nor is it at all likely that his reformation extended to the whole of Judah. We may safely suppose that it was confined for the most part to Jerusalem and its immediate neighbourhood, and that it depended upon the local influence of the followers of Moses in each district of the country whether the revolution effected in the capital was imitated there or not. In Jerusalem, at any rate, many objects of a heathenish complexion, such as *massebahs*, *asherahs*, *bamahs*, and, above all, representations of Yahweh, were destroyed. Amongst these objects the brazen serpent made by Moses is particularly mentioned.

This detail excites our special interest. We cannot be certain what was the origin of the belief that this serpent had been made by Moses; but it seems probable that his name was connected with it in the same way and for the same purpose as Aaron's with the golden bulls. Before the detestation of the reverence paid to this serpent had risen so high as in Hezekiah's time, the reformers endeavoured to disarm the practice by attributing its institution to Moses, and making it a part of the Yahweh worship. We still possess the legend composed with this object, which runs as follows:² When the Israelites had taken a circuit round the land of Moab, they complained of want of water, and said

¹ 2 Kings xviii. 22.

² Numbers xxi. 4—9.

they were tired of the taste of the manna, upon which Yahweh punished them by sending *seraph*-snakes amongst them, and many of them died of their bites. Terrified and humbled, the people entreated Moses to intercede for them, and when he did so his god commanded him to make a brazen *seraph*, and raise it up on a pole. Anyone who had been bitten would only have to look at it to be healed. Moses obeyed; and many Israelites preserved their lives by gazing at this serpent.

Originally, no doubt, the brazen serpent was the symbolical representation of some deity or some divine attribute. The Egyptians likewise regarded the serpent as a sacred animal, and the symbol of the divine power of healing.

This "Serpent-god" then fell, amongst other venerable antiquities, under the strokes of Hezekiah's servants. But it is clear that destruction did not overtake everything which was afterwards regarded as heathenish. *Massebahs*, for instance, were less ruthlessly attacked than images; for the orthodox legends attached to many of them proved more effective in protecting them than had been the case with the serpent, and even the writer who describes how the covenant was concluded at Mount Horeb has no scruple in making Moses set up twelve of these stones round his altar.¹ But many an altar, above all many a *bamah*, of Yahweh was thrown down and destroyed, perhaps because they were built in heathen style or made of chiselled stones, perhaps because they were the centres of a more or less idolatrous worship. But the images of gods, including Yahweh, were the special objects of attack, and henceforth the words "cursed be the man who prepares a carved or a cast image, an abomination in Yahweh's eyes, the work of an artificer, and sets it up secretly," stood at the head of the religious laws of Judah,² followed by such utterances as these: "Cursed be he who curses his father or mother, who removes the boundary mark

¹ See p. 350.

² Deuteronomy xxvii. 15—26.

between the fields, who leads a blind man out of his way, who wrongs the widow or the orphan, who gives himself over to gross in chastity, who slays his neighbour, who takes a bribe to condemn the innocent to death !”

Hezekiah's religious convictions exercised a marked influence upon his political action. The same enthusiasm which revealed itself in the prosecution of these reforms, and in zeal against every Canaanitish practice, naturally led to revolt against Assyria also. The people of Yahweh must not serve strangers, and now that they did what was pleasing in his eyes so faithfully, and observed their ancient covenant with him so strictly, they might surely reckon upon his support. The prophets raised the words of cheer louder than ever : “ Fear not, O Israel, thou people made victorious by Yahweh !”

In many of Israel's hymns this trust in Yahweh's help finds powerful expression. We have already given some of them, as opportunity occurred.¹ One of the most beautiful is the following,² which may very well have been composed in Hezekiah's time :—

Yahweh³ is our refuge and our strength,
 A help that fails not in time of trouble.
 Therefore we fear not, though the earth should swing,
 And the mountains tremble in the midst of the sea.
 Let the foaming waters roar ;
 Let the mountains rock when the sea rages ;
 Yet Yahweh of hosts is with us,
 Our fortress is Jacob's god.

¹ Psalm xvi.; Vol. I., p. 273; Psalm xci. p. 289, Psalm cxlii.; Vol. II., p. 50; Psalm c. p. 59, Psalm xxxiii. p. 68 f.; 1 Samuel ii. 1—10, p. 255 f.; Deuteronomy xxxii.; Vol. III., pp. 250 f.

² Psalm lvi. Col. pp. 376 f.

A rolling stream makes glad the city of God,
That holy city where dwells the Most High.
Yahweh is in her midst, she cannot be shaken ;
Yahweh shall help her at early dawn.
Heathens raged and kingdoms trembled ;
When he lifted his voice, the earth was melted.
Yahweh of hosts is with us,
Our fortress is Jacob's god.

Come and behold the deeds of Yahweh,
Who fills the earth with amazement ;
Who makes war to cease throughout the world ;
Who breaks the bow, who shivers the lance, who
burns the chariots !
" Be still, and acknowledge that I am Yahweh,
Exalted among the heathen, exalted in the earth."
Yahweh of hosts is with us,
Our fortress is Jacob's god.

We may take for granted that all the Judæans were not disposed to revolt from the king of Assyria, and that those who were did not in every case rely implicitly upon Yahweh. King Hezekiah himself, though his love of freedom was closely connected with his zeal for Yahweh, by no means discarded natural means of strengthening himself against the Assyrians.

In the first place he carefully chose the time for declaring himself independent. After conquering Samaria, Shalmaneser's army had indeed taken several cities, even including Ashdod it would seem,¹ whether under Shalmaneser himself or his successor, Sargon, is not certain ; but Tyre had stood a five year's siege with the utmost heroism, and by retaining its independence had falsified Isaiah's prediction that it would be captured and devastated together with Sidon and the other

¹ Isaiah xx. 1.

Phœnician cities.¹ Shalmaneser's or Sargon's successor, Sennacherib, had now turned his arms against the states of Asia Minor, so that when Hezekiah refused his tribute there was no Assyrian army in the neighbourhood.

Moreover he took the natural course of endeavouring to strengthen himself by alliance with other peoples who, like his own, were tributary to Assyria, but had determined to throw off her yoke. Amongst these were probably the Babylonians, whose prince, Merodach Baladan, sent an embassy to Hezekiah.

According to the accounts we now possess,² this embassy came to Jerusalem after the retreat of the Assyrians, and its purpose was to congratulate Hezekiah on his recovery from an illness that had afflicted him that same year. This story is full of impossibilities, for in the first place Merodach Baladan was probably already dead when the Assyrians left Judah; in the next place he would never have sent an embassy to Jerusalem for such a purpose; and, finally, in that special year Hezekiah was poor and destitute, and had none of the treasures to show which, as we shall see, play so important a part in the story.

But it is high time to turn to the story itself. When Hezekiah received the visit of the Babylonians, we are told, he was so flattered by the honour conferred upon him that he exhibited all his treasures and magazines to the ambassadors. But his ostentation was rebuked by Isaiah, who foretold that all his treasures would be carried away to Babylon, and that his very sons would serve there at the court. Upon this Hezekiah expressed his acquiescence in the will of Yahweh, "if only there were peace and prosperity in his own days." This legend, with the miserably poor-spirited and selfish part it assigns to Hezekiah, is simply due to the desire of putting into the mouth of the great

¹ Isaiah xxiii.

² 2 Kings xx. 12-19; Isaiah xxxix.

prophet Isaiah a prediction that Judah would be carried away captive to Babylon. Such a prospect was in reality far beyond his horizon ; for in his days the only threatening power was Assyria. The sole historical reminiscence that may perhaps underlie this story is that the Babylonian prince sought Hezekiah's alliance.

The king sought help in his struggle for freedom not only from his fellow vassals, whose plots were similar to his own, but also from Tirhakah, king of Egypt, who seemed his natural ally. But this step gave great offence to Isaiah, who would not have him trust to Egypt, but only to Yahweh, who would certainly deliver him. The prophet believed with equal certainty in this deliverance, and in the chastisement that must precede it. "Woe to thee!" he cried,¹ addressing Jerusalem, the city of the temple, "woe to thee, hearth of God, hearth of God, dwelling place of David! Year by year let your feasts revolve, till I lay siege to the hearth of God. Wail and bewail! for you shall be a veritable hearth of fire to me. But when you are utterly humbled, and whisper in your dejection like a conjurer of the spirits of the dead, then shall the tumult of your foes be like chaff before the wind. This shall come to pass in a moment, by Yahweh's visitation, with rush and crush, in storm and thunder, with flames of consuming fire. The besiegers of God shall be like dreamers; dreaming that they eat and waking to find themselves famished, dreaming that they drink and panting for thirst when they wake. Nay!" adds the prophet, as he turns directly to his hearers, "look not with such bewildered gaze upon me, as though you were drunk without drinking wine! Yahweh has poured a spirit of drowsiness on you; and my vision has become like a book that is sealed. One who can read takes it up, but he cannot read it, for it is sealed. So they give it to another and say, 'Read this!' and

¹ Isaiah xxix.

he has to answer, 'I cannot read.' And this, says Yahweh, is because my people draws near to me with the lips, but wanders far from me with the heart, and serves me with the ordinances of men which it has got by rote. Therefore will I deal so strangely with this people that their sages and their men of sense shall go utterly astray."

On another occasion he gives unmistakable expression to his condemnation of the action adopted by Hezekiah and his counsellors:¹ "Woe to the rebels who heap sin upon sin, and go to Egypt for help without consulting Yahweh! Pharaoh shall become your shame, and trust in the shadow of Egypt your confusion. Write it in a book that it may serve for the far-off future. It is a stubborn people that will not listen to Yahweh's teaching, and seduces his prophets to see deceitful visions. Thus says Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel: 'By quiet repentance you may be rescued; in the stillness of trust is your might.' But you would not hear him, and said, 'We will fly upon horses,' so you shall flee; 'We will ride on swift chargers,' so your foes shall charge swiftly. A thousand of you shall flee at the threatening gesture of a single foe; before five of them you shall flee, till you are deserted like an ensign planted upon a hill. And yet, O people of Sion, you shall not always weep! He will take pity as soon as you lament, and will give you bread in your affliction and water in your distress. When you repent and fling away your idols, then days of prosperity shall dawn, such as have never been. The moon shall give light as the sun, and the sun shall shine forth with a sevenfold glory. Lo! there comes Yahweh from afar, burning and furious; his lips full of rage; his tongue like a consuming fire; his breath like an overflowing torrent. He winnows the heathen; he wrenches the bit between the jaws of the peoples. Then you rejoice as on the eve of the Passover;

¹ Isaiah xxx.

for Yahweh's voice strikes Ashur with terror, and turns all your foes to a sacrifice of fire."

This discourse of Isaiah's is another example of the strange influence which must have been exerted on the Israelite by his faith in the absolute power of the god of his covenant. It not only supported him in times of trouble, if he believed himself to have earned the favour of his god ; it not only urged him to repentance for fear of Yahweh's judgments, but it compelled him to reject all human means of defending himself and his country. A devout man must not trust to his physician when sick ; a devout prince must build no fortresses, maintain no cavalry or war-chariots, and enter upon no alliances with neighbouring peoples. "In stillness and trust in Yahweh is your might !" was the unvarying principle of Isaiah. Such a precept was never acted upon by a prince, and it is indeed utterly unreasonable ; but it follows immediately from the belief that the deity directly guards his favourites, and blesses them with temporal prosperity. That Isaiah dared to embrace these consequences so boldly and undisguisedly is a proof of the intensity of his conviction. This conviction was very one-sided, and consequently led to absurd results ; but, nevertheless, Isaiah's frank acceptance of them shows his religion to have been more genuine and his consistency more complete than those of Hezekiah and the rest, who also proclaimed their trust in Yahweh, but meanwhile looked out for allies.

Hezekiah, then, together with most of his advisers, was driven to revolt from Assyria by his love of freedom and his trust in Yahweh's help. For he thought he had secured the favour of his god by attacking the image-worship, and accordingly he awaited the approach of the powerful and exasperated foe, trusting on the one hand to Yahweh's help, which the prophets had promised him ; and, on the other, to the assistance of the king of Egypt. Many of his subjects

shook their heads. The sternest preachers of righteousness and the most earnest prophets, such as Isaiah and Micah, looked for a judgment on the sins of the people, and on the want of faith that revealed itself in the alliance with Egypt. The supporters of the ancient half-idolatrous modes of worship were shocked by the destruction of so many sanctuaries of Yahweh, and expected nothing but mischief to come of it. But meanwhile the mass of the prophets cried exultingly, "Hail to thee, Israel! Yahweh will root out all thy foes before thee!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE ASSYRIANS IN JUDAH.

2 KINGS XVIII. 13—XX. 11.¹

FOR the history of the period upon which we are now engaged, we have Assyrian as well as Judæan authorities; for it was the custom of ancient kings to perpetuate their exploits, such as the fortification of cities, the extermination of wild beasts, or the building of temples, and above all their warlike feats, in inscriptions on the walls of their palaces, sometimes adorned with pictures.² This custom was followed by the kings of Assyria, and amongst the ancient monuments of Nineveh which have already been dug out³ there are certain inscriptions of Sargon's and Sennacherib's. We certainly cannot place implicit reliance on their statements, for the vanity of these princes often made them pass over their reverses in silence and magnify their victories; but in spite of all this their inscriptions are of priceless value in supplementing the meagre accounts of the Judæan historians. For instance, Sennacherib's inscrip-

¹ 2 Chronicles xxxii.; Isaiah xxxvi.—xxxviii.

² Compare pp. 162—164.

³ Compare Vol. I., p. 118.

tions teach us the extent of the war against Assyria in which Hezekiah took a part. Phœnicians, Judæans, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, and Philistines had all conspired to throw off the yoke of Assyria, and Egypt sent numerous auxiliaries to their support. But the maritime cities, from Sidon to Aecho, which had to bear the first brunt, soon submitted again; "they stood appalled at the fame of Ashur, my lord," says Sennacherib. Upon this most of the princes who had joined the revolt hastened to submit, and "kissed Sennacherib's yoke." Then Askelon and several other Philistine cities were forced to yield, and when Sennacherib, "trusting in Ashur, his god," had defeated the Egyptians, Ekron also fell. Hezekiah now withstood the mighty Sennacherib alone, and he had to pay a heavy price for his obstinate resistance. The Assyrians took almost all his fortified places except the capital itself, so that, to use the graphic expression of the Assyrian inscription, he "was shut up in his mighty city of Jerusalem like a bird that is brooding," and was so terrified that he attempted to buy off the foe by sending him an enormous amount of gold, silver, and other valuables, to raise which he was compelled to lay hands on the temple treasure, and even to strip off the gold from the doors and doorposts of the sanctuary. So at least we are told by the writer of Kings, but by him alone, and the measure is certainly a strange one. In any case it was of no avail. Sennacherib felt so profoundly the importance of possessing the fortress of Jerusalem as a bulwark against Egypt that nothing would induce him to give up the project of capturing it. So while he was still besieging Lachish, which probably lay south of Jerusalem, or just after the fall of that city, he sent the Tartan, that is the captain of the body-guard, the Rabсарis or overseer of the keepers of the harem, and the Rabshakeh or chief cup-bearer, with a strong division of the army, to demand the surrender of Jerusalem.

The Assyrians encamped on the northern side of the city, and sent a herald to invite the king to a conference. Hezekiah sent some of his chief officers of state to represent him ; and when they asked what the Assyrian king had to say to them, the Rabshakeh delivered his message with great animation and adroitness. "Tell Hezekiah," he said, "that the great king addresses him thus : What do you trust to, in resisting me ? It was but an idle word when you said you had taken your course deliberately and were prepared for war ! Come, now, do you trust to Egypt ?—that broken reed that will pierce the hand of anyone that leans upon it ? A firm support, indeed ! Or do you trust in Yahweh, your god ? But is it not he whose *bamaks* and altars Hezekiah has been throwing down ? However that may be, my king will lay a wager with you : He will make you a present of two thousand horses, if you can find the riders ! How could you resist the paltriest of all my master's vassals—for all your confidence in chariots and horsemen from Egypt ? And do you suppose that I came up to devastate this place without Yahweh ? Why, it was he himself that said to me : Go and destroy the land !" Hezekiah's representatives showed how unequal they were to cope with the Rabshakeh's shrewdness by their innocent request that he would speak Assyrian in order that the people on the wall might not understand ! Upon this he answered, "Do you think my words are only meant for you and for your king ? and not just as much for these people on the wall who must perish of hunger and thirst ?" Then he turned to the sentinels and all the others who were assembled on the walls, and cried aloud, "Thus says Sennacherib : Let not Hezekiah deceive you, for he cannot pluck you out of my hand ! Let him not teach you to trust in Yahweh, as though he would deliver this city ! Where are the gods of Hamath and all those other cities now ? Have they been able to rescue their peoples out of

my hand? What can Yahweh do more than they? Did he rescue Samaria? Listen to Sennacherib's offer: If you will but come over to me, then each of you can quietly enjoy the fruit of his vine and his fig tree, and drink water out of his well, until I take you with me to a land as rich and fruitful as your own. Hearken not to Hezekiah, or you will perish!"

To all these offers and all this boasting no one answered a single word, for such were Hezekiah's orders. But many must have felt their hearts sink within them; and many must have asked themselves in sore perplexity whether Yahweh would, indeed, desert them! It was true enough that Hezekiah had overturned a number of his altars; and, besides, this king of Assyria was so terribly powerful! So many kings had had to yield!—The deep impression made by the Rabshakeh's speech is evinced by the fact that Hezekiah's representatives themselves returned to the king with their garments rent. The Assyrian had told them nothing that they did not know already, but his words had brought the dread reality more clearly than ever before them!

Hezekiah himself was so much moved when they conveyed Sennacherib's demands to him, that he went straight to the temple, with his garments rent; and, in the anguish of his heart, despatched some of his officers, together with certain leading priests, all with their garments rent, to take this message to Isaiah: "Thus says Hezekiah: this day we are in dire extremity. Will not Yahweh, your god, take any heed of the words of scorn which the Rabshakeh has uttered against the living god? Will he not punish the Assyrian for it? Oh! pray for the miserable remnant of the people!"

In Isaiah they had found the right man. Undaunted as ever, he answered the king's messengers with words of cheer: "Tell your master not to fear the blasphemous words of these

servants of the Assyrian king ; for, behold, I will fill him with terror, says Yahweh, and he shall return to his own land and there I will slay him with the sword."

So the Rabshakeh's demand was refused, and he returned to his king, whom he found no longer encamped before Lachish, but at Libnah. There Sennacherib soon heard that Tirhakah of Egypt was approaching with a great army ; so he made one more attempt to gain immediate possession of Jerusalem. He wrote a letter to Hezekiah, in which he pointed out the folly of defying his irresistible forces, and once more demanded the city.

But as soon as Hezekiah had read the letter he went with it to the temple, unrolled it before Yahweh's face, and prayed : "O Yahweh, god of Israel, who sittest upon the cherubs,¹ thou alone art god over all the kingdoms of the earth, and hast made everything. Incline thine ear, O Yahweh, and listen ! Open thine eyes and see ! Sennacherib has insulted thee, the living god. The Assyrian kings have indeed laid waste the lands of the heathens, and have burned their gods, for they were not gods at all, but mere wood and stone, the work of the hands of men. These therefore they could destroy. But now, O Yahweh, our god, deliver us from Sennacherib's hand, that all the kingdoms may know that thou, Yahweh, art the only god !"

This time Hezekiah was far from despondent himself, but Isaiah nevertheless quickened his courage once more ; for he sent a messenger to him with the cheering oracle : "The maid of Sion derides Sennacherib, the daughter of Jerusalem shakes her head at him. Whom but the Holy One of Israel has he reproached with his vauntings of all he has done and how he will conquer Egypt ? All that has happened was ordained by Yahweh ; and because Sennacherib waxes arrogant, Israel's god will curb his pride and put him

¹ See p. 115.

to shame." Hezekiah must not be downcast, for the following year no hostile army should hinder his subjects from tilling their land and consuming the produce. The remnant of Judah should strike root and be fruitful. Salvation should come from Jerusalem. The jealousy of Yahweh should bring all this to pass. Nay, the king need not even fear so much as a siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib. It would not come to that. He would go back by the way he had come, and Yahweh would protect Jerusalem for his own glory and for David's sake.

Isaiah's hopes were not put to shame, for, according to the historian, that very night the angel of Yahweh smote a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the camp of the Assyrians, so that Sennacherib had no choice but to return with the remnant to Nineveh, where he was murdered by two of his sons some time afterwards, as he was worshipping the god Nisroch in his temple. The murderers fled, and Sennacherib's brother, Esarhaddon, succeeded him.

What was it that compelled Sennacherib to return in such haste? The Judæan historian ascribes it to the sword of Yahweh's angel; but we have also an Egyptian tradition of the same event. The Greek historian Herodotus, who visited Egypt in the middle of the fifth century a.c., tells us that he heard the following story from the priests: King Sethos was priest of the god Hephaistos, and greatly despised the warrior caste, thinking he should never need them. Amongst other measures he took away the lands which they had obtained from his predecessors. So when the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, marched upon Egypt with a great army, the warriors refused to go out to battle. This plunged the king into deep distress, and he went to the temple and lamented his hard fate with tears before the deity. As he was thus bewailing himself he fell asleep, and received the cheering announcement in a dream that he need not lose heart; for, when he marched against the Assyrians, he should suffer no harm,

since the deity himself would send him auxiliaries. Trusting to his dream, the prince advanced with all who would follow him to Pelusium, where the enemy was already encamped ; but the troops of Sethos were not practised warriors. They were only hucksters, artizans, and peasants ; but, when he arrived with them at Pelusium, his god sent a host of field mice into the camp of the enemy, and they gnawed at the quivers and bows and the thongs of the shields with such effect that the Assyrians were compelled to flee unarmed the following day, and many of them were slain. And to this day, adds the historian, there is a statue of the king, worked in stone, standing in the temple of Hephaistos, with a mouse in his hand, and the inscription, " Whosoever looks at me, let him reverence the gods !"

This story furnishes an amusing example of how little these Egyptian priests comprehended the ancient symbols of their religion. The mouse was really the emblem of desolation in general, or specifically of the plague ; and the story of the troop of field mice is nothing but an erroneous explanation of the mouse in the hand of the king's statue. The Egyptian king in whose reign Sennacherib was compelled to retreat is called Sethos here, whereas the biblical account makes him Tirhakah. It is not certain, therefore, that the two stories refer to the same event ; though in other respects they agree very well, for the mouse was the Egyptian symbol of the plague, which the Israelites ascribed to the angel of Yahweh.¹

Sennacherib, then, returned to his own country, with an army thinned by the devastating pestilence ; and there he closed his boastful inscription by the statement that he had brought great booty from Judah, as well as other countries, and that Hezekiah had offered him not only tribute but renewed submission. This, however, we know to be false. Hezekiah retained his independence.

¹ Compare 2 Samuel xxiv. 16.

The tone in which Isaiah spoke of the Assyrians on this occasion was very different from that which he had formerly adopted. No wonder ! Though the prophets themselves cherished the conviction that they received exact information as to future events by direct revelations from Yahweh, yet the oracles uttered at different times by the same prophet show us clearly enough that they spoke, like other men, under the influence of complex and varied emotions, and that to them, too, the same event presented itself in a very different light when still in the future and when actually present. As long as the Assyrians were not in the land, as long as Judah's enemies and neighbours only were chastised, so long could Isaiah point to the conquerors as he threatened his own people with punishment, and paint in living colours the chastisement they would inflict on godless Judah also. But when it really came to pass, when every day brought fearful news of the massacres and horrors which accompanied the sack of cities, when the capital itself was in extremest danger and the vaunting words of the Assyrians were passed from mouth to mouth, then the whole thing assumed a different aspect, and the prophet began to ask : If Yahweh's hand is heavy on his people, is that a reason why another nation should do whatever it will with impunity ? Will not his judgment fall on Ashur too ? Why should the heathens triumph thus ? Are they anything but tools in Yahweh's hand ? They too shall fall under his rod !—Then consoling visions of Judah's future came of themselves to complete the picture.

Such were the thoughts expressed in a prophecy of Isaiah's,¹ uttered, in all probability, while Sennacherib's army was still in Judah. Its substance is as follows :—

“Woe unto Ashur, the rod with which I chastised in anger ! I sent him against a godless people, and commanded

¹ Isaiah x. 5—xii.

him to plunder and trample under foot the nation of my wrath ; but he planned its utter destruction, and the rooting out of many nations. All my nobles, he says, are kings ! How many mighty cities have I forced to yield ! And is not Samaria one of them ? Why should I not do to Jerusalem and her images what I have done to Samaria and her gods ? But when Yahweh has fulfilled his judgment on Sion, then will he punish the Assyrian's pride, for he says : ' I gather me the wealth of all peoples, as one gathers deserted eggs from a nest, and no one flutters or chirps ! '—He is but an axe rebelling against the woodman ; a saw that vaunts its might against the workman ! Therefore, shall Yahweh bring low his pride ; Israel's Light shall be a fire to Ashur, his Holy One a flame, burning up all these thorns and thistles in a single day."

" When this comes to pass, then the house of Jacob will no longer put its trust in Ashur that smote it, but will faithfully trust in Yahweh. The remnant repents,¹ the remnant of Jacob turns to God. For though thy people, O Israel ! were countless as the sand on the sea-shore, the remnant only would repent, for Yahweh of hosts is executing a heavy judgment. Then fear not Ashur, O my people that dwellest in Sion ! He smote thee with a heavy hand, as Egypt did of old ; but full soon my wrath will burst over him to destroy him. Yahweh of war-hosts shakes the scourge over him, as he erst smote Midian at Raven's Rock."²

" But a shoot shall spring from the stock of Jesse ; a fruitful stem shall burst from his root. On him shall Yahweh's spirit rest, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and might, of knowledge, and the fear of Yahweh. He shall love the fear of Yahweh, and utter righteous judgment. The poor and the humble he judges truly ; his sentences shall hit the mark ; and he slays the wealthy with the

¹ See p. 339. ² Compare Vol. II., pp. 191, 193.

words of his lips. His loins are girt with justice and faith. Then shall the wolf dwell with the lamb, and the panther lie down with the kid; then the ox shall graze by the lion's side, and a little lad shall pasture them. A cow and a she-bear feed together, their young ones lie down side by side; the lion eats straw like an ox. Then a sucking child shall play by an adder's hole; a child thrust its hand into a serpent's nest. In all my holy mountain shall be nothing that hurts or destroys, for the land shall be full of the knowledge of God, as the waters cover the bed of the sea."

"In that day shall Jesse's shoot be an ensign for the heathens; they shall come to him for instruction and judgment, and his dwelling-place shall be glorious. Then shall Yahweh redeem the remains of his people a second time, from Assyria and Egypt and all the lands to which they have been carried away. He lifts on high a banner, that all the peoples may see; and from every quarter of heaven he collects the scattered ones of Israel and unites the exiles of Judah. Ephraim's jealousy is gone and Judah's restless ones are cut off. Ephraim envies Judah no more, nor Judah vexes Ephraim. But they fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines together, they plunder the sons of the East; they lay their hand upon Edom and Moab, and the sons of Ammon obey them. Then Yahweh dries up the Egyptian sea, strikes the Euphrates and smites it into seven streams, so that men can go over dry-shod, and there is a path for the remnant of my people that remains from Assyria, even as in the day when Israel came out of Egypt."

"Then shalt thou say: I will praise thee, Yahweh, for though thou wast angry with me, thy wrath is appeased and thou comfortest me. Behold the god who delivers me, in whom I trust and tremble not! For my might and my song is Yahweh, who hastened to my succour!—Then you shall drink water out of the wells of salvation, and shall sing:

Praise Yahweh ! Glorify his name ! Proclaim through the nations his mighty deeds ! Chant psalms to him, for his name is exalted ! Sing to the glory of Yahweh, for he has done mighty deeds ! Let it be known throughout all the earth ! Rejoice and exult, O daughter of Sion ! for great is the Holy One of Israel in thy midst."

There is a good deal of Israelitish exclusiveness in these anticipations ; for the blessings of the golden age of the future are specially intended for Israel, and will only be shared by the heathen in so far as they submit to Israel's ruler. It is well for mankind that this prediction has never been literally fulfilled. But nevertheless we are deeply moved, not only by the prophet's unshaken trust in Yahweh's help and his touching hope that the hostility between Ephraim and Judah will disappear, not only by his beautiful description of the great scion of David's house, and the blessings of his rule, but above all by the central thought of the whole prophecy—namely, the belief in a golden age in the future. The Greek and Roman poets sang of a golden age in the past, but expected the world to grow ever more wicked and miserable in the future ; and most men are still heathens in this respect, mourning over a lost paradise and the growing corruption of the world, and expecting nothing but increasing wretchedness. Not so the Israelite believer. He, too, dreamed of a golden age in the past—the time of David—but he hoped and trusted in its return. It was this hope that gave him strength and courage. However defective the form in which he clothed it may have been, it was itself a gift of God, and a sign of true nobility of soul.

When Jerusalem was being threatened by Sennacherib, whether before or after its surrender had been demanded, the king's life was for a time in great peril. He was dangerously ill, and the prophet Isaiah came to him in Yahweh's

name with the words of warning, "Set everything in order, for you are about to die." But Hezekiah had recourse to prayer. With his face turned to the wall, weeping aloud, he besought Yahweh to spare his life, and appealed to all that he had done for the honour of his god. So Yahweh was moved, and before Isaiah had passed out of the court of the palace, he received another revelation from his god of very different purport from the other. Yahweh would restore the king, and that so soon that on the next day but one he would be able to visit the temple. He would still live fifteen years, and the city would be rescued from the hand of the Assyrians. Isaiah went immediately to tell the king of the answer to his prayer, but Hezekiah could hardly believe it; and even when the prophet made the fever instantly abate by laying a bunch of figs upon the place affected, still he begged for some miraculous sign to set his doubts to rest, and assure him that he would really visit the temple in three days. Isaiah gave him his choice whether the shadow on the sun-dial of King Ahaz should move ten degrees forwards or backwards. Hezekiah chose the latter, and at Isaiah's prayer the sun went back so far that the shadow on the index retreated ten degrees.

It need hardly be said that both Isaiah's accurate announcement of the fifteen years that still remained of Hezekiah's life, and the miraculous movement of the shadow on the dial, which would imply a complete revolution in the whole solar system, are purely legendary. We can easily guess how such a story might arise. After this sickness in the fourteenth year of his reign, Hezekiah did actually live for fifteen years, and when the fact was known nothing could be easier or more natural than to make Isaiah predict it. Again, the king's recovery might be poetically described in some such words as these: As though the sun at close of day were to go back and pass once more through the hours on

the dial, so the king's life, when hastening to its close, entered upon its course afresh ; and such a simile might well be transformed by the legend into the account of a miraculous sign. That Hezekiah's recovery was due to his fervent prayer is doubtless a superstitious conception, but it was perfectly natural at a time when religious natures, while tracing the hand of God in disaster and deliverance, failed to enquire into the natural sequence of cause and effect.

A glimpse into the inner thoughts of a pious man, who had recovered from a sickness in those days, is furnished us by Hezekiah's song of thanksgiving, which we find in the book of Isaiah. Its closing lines are as follows:¹

O Yahweh ! bitterness, aye bitterness, has turned to
my salvation !

For thou hast drawn me in thy love from out the
pit of destruction,

Since thou hast cast my sins behind thy back.

For the shadow-land praises thee not,

Death glorifies thee not,

Those who are laid in the grave no longer hope in
thy truth ;

The living, only the living, praise thee,

As I praise thee this day. -

The father makes known to his children thy faith-
fulness.

From these words we see that, if a man grew ill, he attributed it to his sins ; and that Yahweh was supposed to restore him, partly out of love for the sufferer himself, whose trespasses he threw behind him, that is to say, ceased to regard them and forgave them, and partly for his own glory's sake, inasmuch as by letting a devout man die, he robbed himself of a faithful worshipper. But in criticising such an

¹ Isaiah xxxviii. 17--19.

Outpouring as this, we must never for a moment forget that we are not dealing with an intellectual argument, but with an effusion of the heart.

The close connection which the Israelites, in common with other peoples of antiquity, imagined to exist between spiritual and temporal privileges, made them regard every misfortune as a punishment, and relief from it as a sign of God's forgiving love. The intensity of this feeling is evinced by many of their songs. We will give one as a specimen.¹

Bless Yahweh, O my soul !

All that is within me, bless his holy name !

Bless Yahweh, O my soul !

And forget thou not his benefits ;—

Who forgives all thine iniquities,

Who heals all thy diseases,

Who redeems thy life from death,

And compasses thee with grace and mercy ;

Who satisfies thee with all that is good,

And renews thy youth like an eagle's !

Yahweh maintains the right,

And judges truly for the oppressed.

He made known his commands to Moses,

And his deeds to the sons of Israel.

Yahweh is merciful and gracious ;

Slow to anger and plenteous in mercy.

He will not always chide,

Nor keep his anger for ever.

He has not dealt with us after our sins,

Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

For high as the heaven is over the earth,

So great is his favour toward them that fear him ;

As far as the East is from the West,

So far has he removed our transgressions from us.

¹ Psalm ciii.

Like as a father pities his children,
So Yahweh pities them that fear him ;
For he knows our frame,
And remembers that we are dust.
The days of man are like the grass,
Like to a field-flower so he blooms ;
When the wind blows over it, it is gone !
And its place knows it no more.
But Yahweh's favour is from eternity to eternity
towards them that fear him.
His faithfulness to children's children,
If they observe his covenant
And remember to do his commandments.
Yahweh has established his throne in the heavens ;
His dominion spreads over all.
Bless Yahweh, ye his angels, mighty ones !
That do his behest and give heed to his word.
Bless Yahweh, ye his war-hosts !
That serve him and do his pleasure.
Bless Yahweh, all his works, in all parts of his
dominion !
Bless Yahweh, O my soul !

Of course, when Sennacherib left the country it was in a state of profound misery. Listen to Isaiah's description of it in one of his exhortations to repentance:¹ " Hear, ye heavens, and give ear O earth, for Yahweh speaks : ' I have reared and brought up sons, and they are faithless to me. The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib ; but Israel knows nothing, my people is void of understanding.' Woe to the sinful people, heavy with iniquity, the race of evil-doers who work mischief ! They have forsaken Yahweh ; have despised the Holy One of Israel ; have refused to follow him. Where will ye still be smitten, that ye still revolt

¹ Isaiah i. 2—9.

again? The whole head is sick; the whole heart faint. From the crown of the head to the sole of the foot there is not a sound spot; but all is wounds and bruises and festering sores, uncleansed, unbound, unmollified with oil. Your land is a desert; your cities are burned down. The produce of your fields is devoured before your eyes by strangers; all is laid desolate as if by a waterspout. The daughter of Sion is still left, like a hut in a vineyard, like a lodge in a cucumber garden, like a fortress that commands the district. Unless Yahweh of war-hosts leaves us a remnant, we shall soon be as Sodom, and like to Gomorrah." In complete accord with this description is Isaiah's own judgment on the fruitlessness of his work, which we considered in speaking of his prophetic call.¹

What Hezekiah did to alleviate the sufferings of his people we do not know. He fortified and adorned Jerusalem, and supplied it with fresh water by means of subterranean canals, as befitted the city which was spoken of in a song which probably dates from this period as: "The city of Israel's god, his holy mountain, fair in its site, the joy of all the land, the city of the great king, in whose palaces dwells Yahweh, god of war-hosts."² He also waged war with the Philistines and defeated them along the whole border of their land. But how much of all this took place before and how much after Sennacherib's invasion we cannot tell. After Sennacherib's time the Assyrian kings had enough to do to hold their own in Assyria, and could pay but little attention to their distant provinces; and these provinces themselves were too completely drained and exhausted to be able to wage any serious wars against each other.

So Hezekiah's days went on in peace and Judah was beginning to recover slowly from her disasters, when the king died and was followed by his son Manasseh.

¹ See pp. 328, 329.

² Psalm xlviii. 1, 2, 3, 8.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

JUDAH UNDER MANASSEH AND AMON.

2 KINGS XXI.¹

WHEN a religious reformation is accomplished anywhere and a step is taken forward, the period of progress is generally followed by a temporary standstill, or even reaction. This is very natural ; for the victory has not been the result of a universal or even preponderating conviction of the value of the better principles, but has been the work of some few men in advance of their surroundings, who have so infected others with their enthusiasm as to induce many who only half comprehended their purposes actually to help in accomplishing them. And again, the advocates of the old order of things, who owed their defeat in great measure to their want of energy and vigilance, are now thoroughly roused by the fall of the usages and opinions which are dear to them, and collect their forces to recover the lost ground. And they have all the better chance of succeeding because the victors, satisfied with their triumph, are often divided amongst themselves, and have not enough concentration of purpose to be able to offer a successful resistance.

This is exactly what took place in Judah upon Hezekiāh's death. The Mosaic school, which had won its first great victory in his reign, was forced to succumb under his son Manasseh. We cannot follow the Israelite historians in attributing the change entirely to the king himself. He probably followed the stream of public opinion rather than led it ; for though the power of an ancient monarch was limited by no written law, yet his policy was very often determined for him by circumstances. We have not simply to deal with Manasseh personally, then, but with the majority of the

¹ 2 Chronicles xxxiii.

people, which maintained its opposition to the Mosaic school throughout the fifty-five years of Manasseh's reign and the two years of his son Amon.

No wonder! For Hezekiah's measures must in themselves have appeared not only extraordinary but positively impious in the eyes of many of his subjects. Had he not destroyed the altars and other sacred objects of Yahweh, and abolished the most venerable rites? And again, the subsequent fate of Judah may well have raised a doubt as to whether Hezekiah's principles were sound. He had hardly completed his measures before Sennacherib invaded the land; and Judah was evidently abandoned by its god. Jerusalem was indeed delivered. But how? "Like a lodge in a cucumber garden," as Isaiah had too truly said. That saying of the Rabshakeh's: "How can you trust in Yahweh? Is not he the god whose altars Hezekiah has thrown down?" had certainly given utterance to the thought of many a Judean.

As long as Hezekiah lived the Mosaic party remained at the helm of state; but the new ruler followed a different policy. The oppressed heathenisers, who had reached no loftier convictions, but had simply yielded to force, now compensated themselves for their sufferings; and all the rites which the ancient Israelites shared with the heathens were soon restored to honour.

Foremost amongst these was the sacrifice of children to Molech, which was performed in one special place, the Tophet, in the valley of the son of Hinnom.¹ This valley stretches along the southern boundary of Jerusalem, and probably derived its name from some ancient owner or inhabitant. The name "Valley of the son of Hinnom" was afterwards abbreviated into "Valley of Hinnom,"² or in

¹ See Map IV.

² Joshua xv. 8, xviii. 16; Nehemiah xi. 30.

Hebrew Ge-Hinnom, and this again was corrupted into *Gehenna*, and became the designation amongst the later Jews of the abode of the damned and of the devils.¹ Now in this valley there was a certain enclosure walled off, and called "the Tophet," in which stood a number of *bamahs*, altars and images. The meaning of the name is unknown. It was to this place that the children were brought for sacrifice. Jewish scholars, long after the beginning of our era, have represented the children as being burned alive, while the priests attempted to drown their shrieks with music. But this is incorrect. The children were slaughtered just like other victims, and their blood was poured over the sacred stones. Then the bodies were brought to the image of Molech, which was probably in human form, with an ox's head, and its arms stretched out before it sloping downwards towards a hole filled with fire, into which the children rolled when laid upon the outstretched arms, while music was played in honour of the deity. These particulars are gathered from the terms in which certain prophets allude from time to time to this worship, and from the description of an image of Molech that belonged to the Carthaginians, who were themselves of Phœnician or Canaanite origin. It is difficult to make out how far the Judæans who sacrificed their children in the valley of the son of Hinnom distinguished between Molech and Yahweh, and in what relation the worship of the one stood to that of the other; but it is certain that these Molech worshippers frequented the temple of Yahweh, invoked his name, and thought they were pleasing him when they sacrificed their children. Sacrifice to Molech was a part of the ancient Israelitish religions, as well as those of Canaan, and the worship of Yahweh as upheld by the heathen-ry was in every respect modelled after that of Baal, Chemosh, and the other gods of the Canaanites

¹ Compare Vol. V., pp. 167, 174, 214.

and surrounding peoples. The straits to which Judah was reduced in the reign of Ahaz, induced that monarch to offer one of these frightful sacrifices,¹ and perhaps it was he who built the Tophet. Under Hezekiah, the worship there was suspended, or at any rate it languished; but it flourished more than ever under Manasseh, who led the way himself by sacrificing his first-born son.

The worship of the Sidonian goddess Astarte resulted, like that of Molech, from the conception of the deity as a stern, destroying power. Like the worship of Molech, too, it was closely interwoven with the heathenish service of Yahweh, while the Mosaic school included all its usages amongst the "abominations of the Canaanites." In the Old Testament itself we find but few allusions to it, but we are pretty well acquainted with it from other sources. The "consecrated ones," as the Israelites called them, were men who had mutilated themselves in a fit of religious frenzy, on occasion of some festival, and then dressed themselves up in women's clothes, and either ministered at some sanctuary of Astarte, or wandered about in troops through the land, preceded by the sound of horns, with an ass in their midst, bearing a veiled image of the deity and a beggar's wallet. Decked out themselves in many-coloured female garments, with naked shoulders, and with swords, bill-hooks and scourges in their hands, they entered the cities and villages dancing to the sound of their music. Then a revolting scene took place, consisting of howling and hideous dances, fierce self-chastisement, wild confessions of guilt, followed by renewed self-torture, and the whole closed by a collection! With the money thus obtained they endeavoured to compensate themselves, as best they might, for their self-inflicted sufferings.

Side by side with these religious usages which aimed at

¹ Compare pp. 316, 317.

crushing man's physical nature, flourished the Asherah-worship which consecrated in chastity and encouraged the reckless indulgence of every lustful passion.¹ In the temple of Yahweh at Jerusalem there were not only "consecrated ones" such as we have just described, but also priestesses who wove tents for the Asherah² which Manasseh had set up there together with an image of Baal.

Soothsaying and witchcraft, which always accompanied the heathen forms of worship, were now diligently practised, especially under the influence of the Assyrian religion, which found many adherents in Judah, and especially in Jerusalem, under the reign of Manasseh. Ever since the time of Ahaz the Judeans had been in communication with the Assyrians, and had therefore become acquainted with their religion; more especially since Shalmaneser or Sargon,³ and subsequently Esar-haddon,⁴ had recruited the half depopulated district of Israel by colonies of Babylonians, Mesopotamians, and Syrians, and placed it under Assyrian governors. Indeed all the surrounding districts had felt the influence of the Assyrians more or less powerfully, for their armies had shown themselves everywhere, up to the very borders of Egypt. Now in their religion the adoration of the heavenly bodies occupied a foremost place; and these luminaries were worshipped by sacrifice and all manner of other ceremonies. Manasseh was a zealous adherent of these practices, and set up altars in the two courts of the temple for "all the host of heaven," especially the Sun-god, the Moon-goddess, or Queen of heaven, and the five planets. Similar altars were also raised on the roof of the palace of Ahaz. Nay, there were even chariots and horses of the Sun kept in the temple.⁵ This adoration of the Sun was all the more offensive to the Mosaic school because the worshippers, holding a bundle of vine-

¹ Compare p. 148.

² 2 Kings xxiii. 7.

³ 2 Kings xvii. 24 ff.

⁴ Ezra iv. 2.

⁵ 2 Kings xxiii. 5, 11, 12.

twigs to their mouths and facing the East, when paying reverence to the great luminary, turned their backs upon the sanctuary of Yahweh.¹

Manasseh's desire to show honour to as many gods as possible extended further yet. Not only were the sanctuaries of Astarte, Chemosh, and Milcom, which Solomon had built close by Jerusalem, left undisturbed and probably restored by Manasseh, but the friendly relations now subsisting between Judah and Egypt paved the way for the introduction of the religious usages of the later country, until at last they established themselves in the very temple itself. Thus the prophet Ezekiel, when an exile, painted once more the scene he had so often witnessed of the Israelitish women in the temple court bewailing the death of Tammuz, that is Osiris;² and the same prophet spoke of chambers in the buildings round the sanctuary, now bricked up but once accessible enough, on the walls of which were depicted all kinds of animals, quadrupeds, insects, and reptiles, to which incense was burned.³

That the example of Jerusalem should be followed by the other cities was but natural; Jeremiah indeed repeatedly declares that the Judæans sacrificed beneath every green tree, and held licentious festivals upon every lofty hill,⁴ that their gods were as many as their cities, and that they burned incense to Baal in every street of Jerusalem,⁵ and though these statements are manifest exaggerations, yet the Asherah-worship was certainly very prevalent, and many children were sacrificed elsewhere than in the valley of Hinnom, the beds of streams being generally selected for this purpose.⁶

Even at this distance of time and with every desire to be impartial, it is often difficult for us to realise that the members

¹ Ezekiel viii. 16.

² Ezekiel viii. 14. Compare Vol. II., pp. 223 ff.

³ Ezekiel viii. 7—12.

⁴ Jeremiah iii. 6 ff., and elsewhere.

⁵ Jeremiah xi. 13.

⁶ Isaiah lvii. 5.

of this heathenising party were not the monsters of iniquity and licentiousness which their practices would argue them if judged in the light of our present civilisation, but were men of average feeling and culture, obeying in all sincerity the dictates of the prevalent conceptions of deity. We can therefore readily understand the horror with which the leaders of the Mosaic school regarded the customs of their opponents.

We should be wrong, however, in inferring from all this that Judah had renounced its allegiance to Yahweh. The preachers of repentance often indignantly reproach the people with having deserted their god, but we can see from their own words that the accusation was not justified, and that the very people who took part in all these rites, nevertheless swore by Yahweh, frequented his temple, had a very lofty conception of its sanctity, boasted of being Yahweh's people, and trusted in his help for the future. The supporters of the heathen practices really believed that their way of worshipping Yahweh was the true one.

Now though Manasseh was to some extent following his own inclination, which was in accord with that of the majority of his subjects, in favouring the worship of foreign gods and of images, yet there can be no doubt that he was also influenced by political considerations. In the first place his foreign policy pointed in that direction; for the Mosaic school, who would have the Judæans worship Yahweh only, were always disinclined to foster a close alliance with other peoples, for that made not only hostility but even indifference towards their gods impossible. A prince who encouraged commerce, industry, art, and science, must of necessity treat the foreign gods with more or less toleration.

But home as well as foreign policy encouraged Manasseh in his course; for a king who favoured the Mosaic school was in great danger of becoming the mere creature of priests and prophets.

Nothing feeds a man's ambition like the belief that he is the representative of the deity or the mediator between man and God ; hence the spiritual chiefs have in every age grasped at temporal power, and the superstition of princes and peoples has often crowned their efforts with success.

Now in Judah the foundation of a hierarchy had long been laid, and indeed it had been considerably developed by the high position which the Levitical priesthood of Jerusalem took, and the services which the chief priest Jehoiada had rendered to the reigning dynasty.¹ It was but natural that the priests should sedulously build upon this foundation under the reigns of the successors of Joash. Even the higher conceptions of God now entertained contributed to the result. For the more Yahweh was regarded as the infinitely exalted one, the consuming fire before whom the sinner must tremble, the higher was the reverence which the believers paid the priest who could draw near to this dread being with incense and sacrifice, who could take away the sinner's guilt and secure forgiveness for his sins, and the wider grew the chasm that separated the priest from the layman. In ancient times anyone who liked had been allowed to approach or enter the sanctuary, but gradually this came to be thought unadvisable, and only the priests were allowed to enter the temple.

According to the Chronicles laymen were forbidden to enter the sanctuary or to perform any priestly function even in the reign of Uzziah ; for we are told² that that monarch, made presumptuous by his growing power, transgressed against Yahweh, and insisted on penetrating into the temple and burning incense on the altar that stood in the holy place for this purpose. Vain were the warnings of the chief priest Azariah, who followed the king into the sanctuary with eighty other priests and endeavoured to restrain him ! In vain did

¹ See pp. 231 ff.

² 2 Chronicles xxvi. 16—21.

he cry: "It is not for thee, Uzziah, to burn incense to Yahweh! Only the priests, the sons of Aaron, who have been consecrated to the task, may perform it. Leave the sanctuary, for thou art sinning, and it cannot be for thy good in Yahweh's eyes." Uzziah only grew angry with them, and persisted in his purpose. But when he was in the very act of swinging the censer and vituperating the priests, all at once the marks of leprosy appeared upon his brow. The priests gazed at him in horror! There could be no doubt that he was a leper. They hurriedly removed the unclean creature from the sanctuary, and he himself submitted quietly to his fate, for he felt that Yahweh's hand had smitten him. He remained a leper to the day of his death, and was kept apart, while his son Jotham governed in his place.

This story is evidently a fiction. It is just like the Chronicler, who is a priest to the backbone, to make Yahweh punish a transgression of the priestly laws with leprosy. The name of "the sons of Aaron," which is here given to the priests, is of later origin, and indeed the sharp distinction between priests and laymen is altogether an anachronism when transferred to Uzziah's time; for his grandson Ahaz still sacrificed in the temple with the approbation of the priests themselves;¹ nor was the exalted conception of Yahweh's being, from which the sharp distinction between priests and others flowed, at all widely spread, even suppose it existed, in the days of Uzziah.

But if the Chronicler is vastly premature in this as in all his representations of the usages of worship, he nevertheless indicates the direction in which things were now moving in Judah. In early times the princes were often members of the priesthood, and the king himself performed the functions and enjoyed the privileges of a priest;² but now the Levites of the temple of Jerusalem were gradually forming them-

¹ 2 Kings xvi. 11, 12.

² Compare p. 232.

selves more and more completely into a close caste, from which even the king was excluded, and which claimed extensive rights and privileges.

Besides the Levitical priests of the temple at Jerusalem, there were many prophets who maintained the exclusive worship of Yahweh. We have seen that between the reigns of Solomon and Amaziah prophecy played but a very secondary part in the development of Judah's history, and at any rate the prophets never took the position of popular leaders, as they did in northern Israel. This was not due to any difference of aim or disposition between the messengers of Yahweh in the two kingdoms, but simply to the fact that David's posterity had retained the throne of Judah almost without opposition, and no great religious conflict had been there fought out; but, in the seventh century, a change took place in this latter respect. The loftier conceptions of the deity, the fresh life that revealed itself in the literary activity of the prophetic schools, and the growing conviction that Israel was the chosen people of Yahweh, the only God, could not fail to stimulate religious enthusiasm in every direction. The battle against idolatry and image worship, and all that conflicted with the Mosaic worship of Yahweh, was ever calling fresh forces into the field.

In many respects priests and prophets stood at the opposite poles; but, when it was a question of defending the purity of the worship of Yahweh, they joined hands with each other, and under Hezekiah their united forces had constituted a very powerful party, which could rely upon the heartiest support from the king, but laid him under no little restraint. If Manasseh wished successfully to maintain his independence in the face of this combination of priests and prophets, he had no choice but to throw himself into the arms of their opponents.

Thus the religious convictions of the majority of the

people, combined with the natural desire of the king himself to shake off the restraints to which the Mosaic school would subject him, secured to the conservative or so-called heathen tendencies a speedy triumph.

The heathen school remained at the helm of state throughout the reigns of Manasseh and Amon and the early years of Josiah. So, at least, says the book of Kings. The Chronicler, on the other hand, informs us that Manasseh only reigned after this godless fashion at first; but that when he and his people refused to listen to the voice of their god, Yahweh sent the generals of the Assyrian king, and they took Manasseh captive and led him to Babylon in chains of brass. Then, we are told, he prayed in his distress to Yahweh, and humbled himself before the god of his fathers, who suffered himself to be appeased, brought him back to Jerusalem, and restored him to his throne. Then Manasseh perceived that Yahweh was God, and not only fortified Jerusalem but rooted out idolatry. He commanded his people to worship Yahweh, and they did so. The *bamahs* were still allowed to stand, but henceforth Yahweh alone was worshipped at them.

The Chronicler has certainly derived this story from some more ancient authority. His mentioning certain writings as containing the words of the prophets who warned Manasseh, and even the prayer which the king himself uttered in captivity, does not go for much. But it appears from the Assyrian inscriptions that Manasseh really was a vassal of Asarhad-don's. It is highly improbable, however, that he was ever taken to Babylon as a prisoner, and certain that he did not reform the religion of Judah; for in the first place the book of Kings has not a word of all this, and the Chronicler himself is very vague in his account, neither giving us the name of the Assyrian king, nor telling us how Manasseh regained

his liberty and was restored to his throne; and in the next place, history teaches us that Josiah inaugurated many reforms which would have been rendered quite superfluous if his grandfather had already accomplished them.

Moreover, if Manasseh really repented of his heathenish proclivities and became an advocate of the exclusive worship of Yahweh, how comes it that the writer of Kings regards the fall of Judah as the punishment for Manasseh's idolatry? Nor does this writer stand alone. Jeremiah, too, believes that the fall of Jerusalem was irrevocably decreed in consequence of Manasseh's sin. "Yahweh says to me," he exclaims,¹ "Though Moses and Samuel stood before me to avert my wrath, my heart could no more be moved for this people. Drive them away, and cast them out of my sight! And if they say to you, 'Where must we go?' then answer: Thus says Yahweh: To death! those that are fated to death. To the sword! those who must fall by the sword! To famine! those who must die of hunger. To exile! those whose fate is banishment. Four kinds of scourges will I bring upon them: the sword, to slay; the dogs, to devour; the fowls of the air and the beast of prey, to rend and destroy. I will make them the sport of the kingdoms of the earth, because of Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, and because of his deeds in Jerusalem. Who would spare thee, Jerusalem! Who would pity thee! Who would turn aside to ask after thy weal! Thou hast forsaken me, says Yahweh; thou art utterly apostate, wherefore I turn my hand against thee to root thee out. I have repented, till I am weary, of my purpose to destroy thee, and now I will repent no more." Jeremiah was born during the reign of Manasseh, and if the king had really pursued a different course at the close of his life from what the prophet means by "deserting Yahweh," he could not have helped knowing it. We are therefore safe in

¹ Jeremiah xv. 1-6.

assuming that the account in Chronicles is a fiction. The writer doubtless gathered from the fact of Manasseh's reigning prosperously for more than half a century and then departing in peace, that he must have seen the error of his ways. Otherwise, how could Yahweh's dealings with him be justified?

The Chronicler declares that Manasseh's prayer was to be found in ancient writings; and in this connection we may mention that the so-called Apocryphal books of the Old Testament, which have passed from the Greek translation into the bibles of the Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches, contain what purports to be the prayer of Manasseh. It is a comparatively recent production.

Manasseh, then, pursued the same policy throughout the five and fifty years of his reign, and his son, Amon, trod in his footsteps; but, after a reign of two years only, this prince was murdered in the palace by some of his courtiers. The motive to this deed is quite unknown. We have no reason to suppose that zeal for the service of Yahweh armed the hands of the assassins. Their purpose, whatever it may have been, was defeated, for "the people of the land" slew them and crowned Josiah, Amon's son, a boy of eight years old.

Though there is nothing to justify a suspicion that Amon's murder was the work of the Mosaic zealots, yet, of course, they had resisted the triumph of the heathenising party with all their might. How could they stand by passively while the fruits of their victory under Hezekiah were all being snatched away? And we may well believe that the king on his side made all who resisted him feel the weight of his hand. In ancient times the sword was the chief argument by which conflicting opinions sought a settlement; and the temples of slaughter set by Elijah and Jehu in Israel, and

even to some extent by Jehoiada in Judah, prevent our judging Manasseh too severely, if he persecuted some of the leaders of the Mosaic school.

"He filled Jerusalem with innocent blood from end to end," says the writer of Kings. According to a Jewish tradition, preserved in the Talmud, Isaiah was one of his victims. If this is true, the prophet must have been extremely old, for he began to prophesy in the year of Uzziah's death,¹ that is to say, sixty years before Manasseh's accession. The tradition, however, is too late to deserve our confidence; and, if the writer of Kings had known anything of the matter, he would surely have recorded it. This special story, therefore, cannot be accepted; and if the historian's statement, that all Jerusalem was filled with innocent blood, refers to the persecuted disciples of the Mosaic school rather than to the children sacrificed to Molech, it is an obvious exaggeration. But the faithful followers of Moses must necessarily have had a hard time of it, and many of them, doubtless, lost their lives. The truth of the supposition is confirmed by the terrible vengeance which they afterwards exacted.

In Israel the Mosaic school had very seldom experienced the hostility of the monarchs; and even then it was not very bitter. In Judah they had never been exposed to any serious attack. It stands to reason, therefore, that Manasseh's persecution must have made a deep impression. While the faint-hearted renounced their convictions, those who remained faithful clung to their principles more firmly, grasped them more clearly, and worked them out more consistently than ever. Here, too, the blood of the martyrs watered the Church, and the heathenising school that sowed the wind would reap the whirlwind.

¹ See p. 328.

CHAPTER XXIX.

PSALMS AND PROVERBS.

PSALMS XXII., CIX., XXIX.; PROVERBS I. 7. — IX.

NOTHING could be more natural than the conjecture that some of the psalms reflect the emotions which so many of the advocates of the exclusive worship of Yahweh must have experienced under Manasseh's rule. It is exceedingly difficult, however, to determine the date of any given poem in the book of Psalms, for they hardly ever contain any names or distinct allusions to facts with which we are acquainted, and their contents are so general as to afford hardly any clue to their date. We cannot be sure, therefore, which of the psalms belong to Manasseh's time, and can go no further than to say of some of them that they may possibly or probably have been composed at that period, though they may also have been written one or more centuries later.

For instance, there is nothing to prevent our supposing that the twenty-second psalm dates from this epoch. This poem had a special significance for the first Christians, since they regarded it as a prediction of the sufferings and death of the Christ; and accordingly we find frequent allusions to it in the gospel narratives of the crucifixion. For this reason we will take it as an example, in preference to other psalms, such as the third, fourth, fifth, eleventh, twentieth, or twenty-first, which are in themselves equally appropriate:

“My god! my god! why hast thou forsaken me,
 Far from my rescue!”—so I complain.
 My god! I cry by day, but thou answerest not;
 By night, but I find no rest.
 Yet thou art the Holy One,
 Enthroned on the praises of Israel.

Our fathers trusted in thee ;

They trusted, and thou didst deliver them.

When they cried unto thee, they were rescued ;

They built upon thee and were not put to shame.

But I am a worm and no man,

The scorn of men and contempt of the people.

All they that see me laugh me to scorn,

Curling the lip and shaking the beard :

“ He trusted in Yahweh ! then let him rescue him ;

Let him deliver him, since He delights in him ! ”

Nay, it was thou that didst bring me to birth,

And didst lay me in peace on my mother's breast.

Thou hast been my protection since first I drew breath,

And as long as I live thou art still my god !

Be not far from me, for trouble is nigh,

And there is none to help.

Many bulls have circled me round,

Bulls of Bashan have compassed me,

Men open wide their jaws upon me,

Like a ravening, roaring lion.

I am poured out like water ;

My bones are shaken asunder ;

My heart is like wax,

It is melting within me.

My throat is dried up like a potsherd ;

My tongue cleaves to the roof of my mouth ;

Thou hast brought me to the dust of death.

Nay, I am surrounded by dogs ;

A band of villains encircles me ;

They have pierced my hands and feet !¹

I can count all my bones.

My enemies look on and exult in my misery,

¹ The translation is very uncertain.

They have parted my garments among them,
And cast lots for my vesture.
But thou, O Yahweh, be not far !
O my strength ! haste thee to help me.
Rescue my soul from the sword,
My life from the power of the dogs,
Deliver me from the lion's mouth ;
Save me from the horns of the buffaloes.

I will proclaim thy name to my brothers,
And praise thee in the midst of the assembly
Ye worshippers of Yahweh, praise him !
Unite in his praise, ye seed of Jacob !
Tremble before him, all Israel's offspring !
The affliction of the afflicted he despises not nor con-
temns,
He hides not his countenance from them,
But hearkens to their entreaty.
From thee comes the bliss that I celebrate in the midst
of a great assembly.
I will pay my vows in the presence of them that
fear thee.
The oppressed shall eat till they are satisfied ;
Yahweh shall be praised by his worshippers.
May their heart live for ever !
All the world shall remember and come back to
Yahweh ;
Before thy face shall all nations bow.
For Yahweh is king
And rules over the heathens.
The great ones of the earth shall be sated, and bow
before him,
The humble shall all bend low,

The offspring of the destroyed shall serve him.¹

They shall tell of the Lord to remote generations.

They shall come and declare his righteousness,

His deeds to a new generation.

The expounders of this and of many other psalms have often been much perplexed to determine whether the poet is speaking of himself only, or whether he lays his lamentations upon the lips of the suffering community. On the one hand, the poet seems to give utterance to the intense individual suffering which he himself has endured; and on the other hand, he rises so completely out of the sphere of personal considerations when he indulges his expectation of the general triumph of the worship of Yahweh, that we completely forget both him and his sorrows. The most natural explanation of all this is to suppose that the poet when persecuted for his faith, knowing that his lamentations were not his alone, and sympathising with all who suffered in the same cause, described their bitter experiences under the type of his own. His sufferings and those of his brothers were the sufferings of all the devout, the whole community of Yahweh's faithful worshippers; and his deliverance would be the triumph of his god. This peculiarity gives to many of the psalms all the warmth which belongs to personal outpourings of the heart, while preserving a generality of application which makes them suitable for every age and for individuals and communities alike.

But this identification of the poet's personal desires with the honour of God carries with it one great danger which the psalmists did not escape. If their cause was the cause of their god, then their enemies were the enemies of Yahweh, and they had not the smallest scruple in cherishing the bit-

¹ The translation is doubtful.

terest hatred of them. To love one's enemies was a virtue the glory of which was sometimes¹ perceived in antiquity, but very rarely. Not only was the rule 'Love your friends and hate your enemies,' subject to few exceptions, but to spare an enemy would, generally speaking, have been decried as pusillanimous. Must not the relative of a murdered man pursue the murderer and avenge his kinsman's blood? It was his sacred duty. The right of reprisal was a legal, nay, a divine privilege. Yes, divine! for Yahweh himself exercised it, in requiting every man according to his deeds. Nowhere is this proposition laid down more sharply, I had almost said more offensively, than in the following verses of a psalm:²

Yahweh has recompensed me for my virtue,
 Rewarded me openly for the cleanness of my hands.
 For to the merciful thou art merciful;
 And upright to the upright man;
 To the faithful thou art faithful,
 Perfidious to the false.
 For thou dost save the afflicted people
 And humble the eyes of pride.

Extraordinary as the assertion sounds that Yahweh himself deceives the deceitful man, it is no more than is contained in the proverb:³

Yahweh's curse is on the house of the godless,
 But the dwelling of the just he blesses.
 For he will mock the mockers,
 But show grace to the oppressed.

The conception of the divine nature which underlies these and other such utterances sanctions and almost hallows the

¹ See Exodus xxiii. 4, 5; Proverbs xxv. 21, 22.

² Psalm xviii. 24—27; 2 Samuel xxii. 25—28. ³ Proverbs iii. 33, 34.

hatred of Yahweh's foes. The feelings expressed in the following lines¹ were permissible and even imperative upon the Israelite :

Should not I hate them that hate thee,
And abhor them that oppose thee ?
I hate them with intensest hatred ;
I hold them for my foes.

Hence many poems, such as Psalms v., lviii., lix., lxix., cxxix., cxxxvii., are disfigured by expressions of bitter hatred. Indeed they are sometimes so full of them that they may well be called the "psalms of cursing." We give as an example a portion of a psalm, which, if not itself written in Manasseh's time, is probably an imitation of a poem of that period :²

O God, whom I praise, be not silent !
The mouth of the godless, the mouth of deceit, is opened
against me ;
They speak to me with deceitful tongue,
Words of hatred surround me,
They attack me without a cause.
In reply to my love they assault me ;
While I am ever praying.³
They repay evil for good,
Hatred instead of love.
Set a godless man in power over him,
And let an accuser be ever near him !
When sentence is given may he be condemned ;
May his prayer be counted as sin !
May his days be few !
May another man take his post !

¹ Psalm cxxxix. 21, 22.

² Psalm cix. 1 ff.

³ The translation is very doubtful.

Let his sons be orphans,
His wife a widow !
May his children wander about as beggars
And seek bread, far from their ruined home !

And in this strain the poet goes on till his curses at last melt into lamentations and prayers for deliverance.

So lamented and cursed, so prayed and sighed, full many an oppressed disciple of the Mosaic school while Manasseh and Amon reigned.

However great the interest which most of the Judæans felt in these contested questions, there was at least one circle of religious thoughts which was almost unaffected by them. What had the sacrifices to Molech or the worship of Asherahs, the feasts of new moon and the adoration of images to do with the revelation of God in nature? To the more cultivated members of either party, but especially to the reformers, Yahweh was the god of gods, the creator of heaven and earth, the god who revealed his glory in the thunderstorm and the sunshine, the rain and the whirlwind. In the book of Psalms we still find some few songs which celebrate Yahweh's greatness as revealed in nature. It is, of course, impossible to assign their exact date, but they may have been written at any time after the Israelites had learned to believe that Yahweh was the god of the heavenly hosts, and that the visible creation was the scene upon which he revealed his power. They may date from any period after the eighth century therefore.

Let us take as an example a poem whose author does not seem as yet to have risen to the conception of God's unity, for in the first verse he addresses the sons of the gods, which must mean either angels or subordinate deities ; but the expression is too obscure to warrant any confident deductions. The poem in question is Psalm xxix.

Praise Yahweh, O ye sons of gods,
Give Yahweh praise and glory!
Give Yahweh the honour due to his name,
Bow before Yahweh in sacred apparel!
Yahweh's voice is upon the waters; the glorious god
is thundering.
Yahweh's voice rolls o'er the waters of heaven.
Yahweh's voice is mighty;
Yahweh's voice is full of majesty.
The voice of Yahweh breaks the cedars;
Aye! Yahweh shatters the cedars of Lebanon.
He makes them leap,—Mount Lebanon like a bull,
And Hermon like a buffalo.
Yahweh's voice flashes flames around it.
Yahweh's voice makes the desert tremble,
Yahweh makes the desert of Kadesh shudder.
Yahweh's voice makes the hinds cast their young.
Yahweh's voice strips the bark from the forest.
In his heavenly palace all cries: Glory!
Yahweh enthroned him on mighty waters,
Still Yahweh is throned there, as king eternal!
Yahweh will give his people might;
Yahweh blesses his people with riches.

We have not many of these psalms of nature. Psalm civ., which is too long for insertion here, and was probably composed at a later date, contains a very poetical description of Yahweh's glory. He is enthroned in heaven; he makes the winds his messengers and the lightning flashes his servants;¹ he has created the earth and all that is on it,² and has sustained man and beast ever since.—Why could not the poet who adapted this song for the temple service rest content

¹ After an amended version of v. 4.

² Compare Vol I., pp. 42, 43.

with such a celebration of Yahweh's glory? Why must he add these words at the close?—

The sinners shall be destroyed from the earth ;

The godless shall be there no more.

Praise Yahweh, O my soul !

Hallelujah !

No doubt a considerable number of songs and many Israelitish myths have been lost to us in consequence of the feeling, very laudable in itself, that Yahweh's revelation in nature was as nothing compared with his glory displayed in the Law.¹ In the first part of Psalm xix.² we still possess the fragment of an ancient psalm of nature ; and the grandeur of its opening lines shows that its author was no ordinary poet :—

The heavens declare the glory of God,

The firmament heralds the work of his hands ;

Day upon day pours forth instruction,

• Night upon night bears witness.

Unfortunately, some of the lines that follow are obscure and unintelligible, while the last half of the psalm is a glorification of Yahweh's law, which evidently had no connection whatever with this psalm of nature.

We have often observed already that the Israelites, like everyone else, conceived their god after their own likeness, and ascribed to him whatever they regarded as most noble and glorious in man. The level of culture which they had reached at any period was reflected in their conception of their god. At a low stage, when the pleasures of sense were supreme, they described Yahweh as eating and drinking, put into good humour by the pleasant smell of a sacrifice, and made merry by wine.³ When prowess in battle was held to be the greatest

Compare Vol. II., pp. 227—239.

¹ Ps. 1—6.

² Judges ix. 12.

virtue, Yahweh became a mighty warrior, brandishing his sword and spear, and rushing upon the foe with a war-cry like the lion's roar. The stern moralist, on the other hand, saw in Yahweh a being of moral holiness and of strictest justice, rewarding every man according to his work; and tender hearts would sometimes rise to the thought of Yahweh's pitying love. The proverb-makers or "sages," for their part, saw in him the perfection of wisdom, the god who had deliberately adapted everything to its purpose.

This is especially exemplified in a section of the book of Proverbs,¹ which was, perhaps, written in the age of Manasseh. It does not consist, like the other portions of the book of Proverbs, in unconnected sayings, but is one continuous discourse. It is a very earnest exhortation to a moral life, a warning against murder, theft, contentiousness, dishonesty, sloth, and, above all, in chastity and adultery. To this last point the writer constantly reverts.

His view of the connection between piety and wisdom is characteristic. He regards the fear of Yahweh as the first step on the path of wisdom, and Wisdom herself as the most glorious possession that can fall to man. He introduces her as speaking thus:²

Come now, children! hearken to me.

Blessed are they who abide on my paths!

Hear my instruction,

That you may be wise and not unrestrained.

Blessed is the man that hearkens to me,

Daily attending my gates

And keeping watch at my door-posts!

For whoso finds me, he finds life

And gains the favour of Yahweh.

But he who sins against me wrongs his very soul;

And whoso hate me, they love death.

¹ Proverbs i. 7—ix.

² Proverbs viii. 32—36.

Wisdom is Yahweh's possession also. It was with her help that he formed the world.¹

Yahweh established the earth by wisdom
And reared the heavens by understanding.
By his knowledge the oceans break through
And the clouds drop down with dew.

Just as the writer personifies Wisdom, and makes her exhort mankind by means of her friends who sit in the gate of the city, so he also makes her boast that she stood by Yahweh's side when he created the world.²

Yahweh possessed me when he began his work,
Before he made anything, even of old.
From eternity was I anointed,
From the beginning, before the world was.
When the oceans were not, was I born,
When there were no gushing springs,
Before the mountains had gained their foundations.
Before the hills, was I born.
No corn-land or pastures were made as yet
Nor the masses of earth that form dry land ;
When he made the heaven I was with him,
When he stretched its vault athwart the chasm ;
When he hung the clouds above
And the springs burst forth from the depth ;
When he set its bounds to the sea, that its waters
should not mount over its shores,
And established the pillars of earth ;
Then was I with him as an artificer,
His delight day after day,
Rejoicing with him always.
And now I sport on the face of earth
And rejoice with the children of men.

¹ Proverbs iii. 19, 20.

² Proverbs viii. 22—31.

The meaning of the last lines appears to be that Yahweh always took pleasure in that wisdom which now spreads delight through the world, and whose joy it is to make men happy. But whatever the precise meaning of this representation of Wisdom may be, we should certainly be wrong in looking for any philosophical conception underlying it. It has, indeed, given rise to many speculations, but it is nothing itself more than a poetical personification. The Wisdom which stood by Yahweh's side at the creation is the same that exhorts mankind and leads them on to life.

This work, like the psalms of nature, is entirely free from allusions to any religious contest. The fact may very fairly be urged as an argument that it is of later origin than we have supposed, and was written when the conflict was already over; but the inference is far from being as certain in the case of these sages as it would have been in the case of prophets or priests. From Solomon's time onwards the tendencies of the "wise men" had been broadly human rather than especially Israelitish; and though not opposed to religion, they had always insisted upon morality and a sensible mode of life rather than upon sacrifices and all the accompaniments of religious worship.

But now a certain change may be observed. The conception of Yahweh's being had become very exalted, and he was revered as the creator of the world and the ruler of the fates of men; the sages, therefore, might easily bring the recognition of his power into connection with their principles of the conduct of life. Now that religion had become more reasonable the sages grew more religious. The writer of Proverbs i. 7—ix. even utters the following exhortation:¹

Honour Yahweh with your substance,
With the first-fruits of all your increase;

¹ Proverbs iii. 9, 10.

Then shall your barns be filled with plenty,
And your presses shall overflow with wine.

But it was still the exception for the "wise men" to turn their attention to such things. No doubt these preachers of morality often looked down with a kind of contempt upon the zealots and fanatics who contended so eagerly about the best forms of worship.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE BEGINNING OF JOSIAH'S REIGN.

2 KINGS XXII. 1, 2; ¹ JEREMIAH I—II. 13.

HEZEKIAH'S religious reformation had been the work of the king rather than of the people; but during the rule of Manasseh and Amon the principles of the Mosaic school took deeper and deeper root, while its members looked with ever-growing indignation upon the prevalence of heathen practices. Though their mouths were still closed by fear, they were nevertheless plotting the best means of rooting out all these idolatries and abominations. A storm was evidently gathering.

In ancient times the very religion of a people depended to an almost incredible extent on the line of action taken by its king; and it was only natural that, as soon as Josiah ascended the throne, the followers of Moses should fix their eyes upon him with extreme anxiety, and ask what the new rule would yield. Josiah, however, was but eight years old; and it would seem that the regent, who held the reins of the state during his minority, either sympathised with the conservatives or, at least, shrank from taking the vigorous measures which a thorough religious reformation would de-

¹ 2 Chronicles xxxiv. 1—3.

mand. The reformers, therefore, were compelled to bide their time; but their zeal burned all the hotter, and, when the smothered flames of their faith and hate should at last break out, they would rage all the more fiercely.

Meanwhile they became more and more clearly conscious exactly what they wanted and how they meant to get it. First of all, they were determined absolutely to put down both the service of all gods but Yahweh and the worship of images. These two points were embraced in the current version of the Ten Commandments under one great precept: "Thou shalt not worship any gods beside me, Yahweh, nor shalt thou make thyself any image of a god of any form whatsoever, nor bow down before it; for I, Yahweh, am a jealous god, and visit the sins of those that hate me, from father to son, to the third and fourth generation, but show mercy to them that love and obey me to a thousand generations.¹ Moreover, the reformers were determined to suppress and abolish whatever they regarded as of Canaanitish origin, such as anointed stones, *asherahs*, images of the sun, sacrifices of children, and unchaste religious customs. This was equivalent to carrying out the important measures towards the accomplishment of which Hezekiah had already taken certain steps. The reformers now required that they should be carried out inexorably. The freedom of religious usages must be laid under close restrictions. Henceforth there must be but one place of worship, the temple on Mount Sion, and every sacrifice offered elsewhere must be branded as a heathenish abomination. The priesthood, too, must be confined henceforth to Levi, the tribe to which the influential servants of the temple of Jerusalem belonged.

We need hardly ask who took the foremost part in the reformation of the seventh century. The Levitical priesthood furnished the leading spirits round whom the others

¹ After an amended version.

gathered, and were the boldest champions of the reformation. Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, who was the greatest prophet of the succeeding period, and a stout supporter of the reformation, was himself a priest of the temple at Jerusalem; but he was far from surrendering himself to the guidance of his colleagues, and complained that the preaching of the prophets altogether tended to establish the supremacy of the priests.¹

Throughout the first eighteen years of Josiah's reign the reformers were compelled to bide their time. No doubt it became ever clearer that the king was in sympathy with them; but as yet he took no decisive steps to give effect to their wishes. According to the book of Chronicles, indeed, he not only began to seek the god of his father, David, when he was sixteen years old, but vigorously prosecuted the reform of Judah's religion from the twelfth year of his reign. But this assertion is obviously false; for the discovery of the book of Yahweh's law, which the book of Kings represents as the proximate cause of the reformation, is strangely out of place in the story of the Chronicler, where it is not mentioned until the whole affair has long been settled.

Let us now glance at the political condition of Judah in the first years of Josiah's reign.

Under Manasseh and Amon the country had already begun to recover from the disastrous wars against Assyria; and Josiah seemed to have a fair chance of considerably extending its power. From Assyria he had nothing to fear, for the former mistress of the world was now tottering to her fall. The powers of Media and Babylonia had laid siege to Nineveh, and the king was compelled to leave his distant provinces to their fate.

When we remember Isaiah's denunciations of the Assy-

¹ Jeremiah v. 31.

rians and their pride, we may well conceive the feelings with which the Judæans heard that their mortal foes were now surrounded by deadly peril. The prophecy of Nahum gives powerful expression to their joy in Nineveh's humiliation. We cannot tell exactly when this man of God uttered his oracles, but it was certainly after Sennacherib's defeat, and not improbably during the siege of Nineveh by the Medes and Babylonians. "See! there upon the mountains comes the messenger of joy," he cries to his countrymen, "the bearer of glad tidings drawing near! Now celebrate your feasts, O Judah! and perform your vows, for henceforth the man of Belial shall no more pass through you. He is utterly destroyed!"¹ The prophet compares Nineveh to a lion's den full of plunder; but Yahweh will snatch all her plunder from her, and burn her chariots.² She was a city of blood, full of lying and violence, but Yahweh would put her to utter shame and none should pity her.³ "The shepherds thou hast appointed, O king of Ashur, shall slumber, and thy princes shall lie down in sleep; thy people shall be scattered on the mountains, and no one shall gather them again. Thy bruises shall not be healed, and thy wound is grievous. All they that hear of it clap their hands for very joy, for whom hast not thou afflicted?"⁴ Whenever these words were uttered, they undoubtedly reproduce the feelings with which the Judæans heard of every disaster that fell upon Assyria.

From the South, Judah had more to fear; for Psammetichus had become king of the whole of Egypt, after the land had been divided for a considerable time amongst twelve monarchs, and this powerful and warlike king aimed at extending his territory at the expense of his north-eastern neighbours. But he had already been besieging the Philis-

¹ Nahum i. 15.² Nahum ii. 12, 13.³ Nahum iii. 1, 6, 7.⁴ Nahum iii. 18, 19.

tine city of Ashdod in vain for years, and, though his power may have occasionally caused the king of Judah some uneasiness, yet the people gradually became accustomed to having the Egyptian army in their neighbourhood, and the obstinate resistance offered by Ashdod went far towards allaying their fears.

Josiah, therefore, reigned in peace, and no threatening danger gave the Mosaic enthusiasts occasion for insisting on the reform they longed for. As long as the people basked in prosperity, Yahweh must surely be content. What more could heart desire than peace and prosperity? To borrow a metaphor employed by a prophet of those days, the people were like wine standing untapped upon its lees. They muttered carelessly, "Oh! Yahweh never does anything, good or bad!"¹

But strange and fearful rumours suddenly arose in Judah. Nineveh was delivered and the king of the Medes defeated—not by the Assyrians, however, but by a people utterly unknown before. They were the Scythians, and their countless hordes of horsemen, armed with lance and bow, streamed over Asia, plundering and devastating on every side. About the eighteenth year of king Josiah, they were pressing on further and further, and spreading terror and consternation everywhere.

These events caused the rise of several prophets in Judah. One of them was the man from whom we borrowed a few words but now. His name was Zephaniah; his great-great-grandfather was called Hezekiah,² and was probably the king of that name. We still possess one of his oracles, or rather a collection of short discourses, the connection of which it is often difficult to make out, on account of the sudden transitions from the most violent denunciations of punishment to the most glorious promises. Probably Zephaniah had his

¹ Zephaniah i. 12.

² Zephaniah i. 1.

eye upon the Scythians when he thus described the great day of Yahweh's judgment:¹ "A day of wrath, of trouble and distress, of fierceness and of desolation; a day of gloom and darkness, of clouds and obscurity; a day when the trumpet shall sound against all fortresses and turrets. Then will I bring trouble upon men, and they shall grope upon their way like the blind, because they have sinned against Yahweh. Their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as dung. Neither shall their silver or their gold deliver them in the day of Yahweh's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his vengeance, for he shall make an end speedily of all the dwellers in the land."

The prophet draws an appalling picture of Jerusalem's wickedness.² "Woe to the abominable and polluted one, the city of oppression! She has not hearkened nor taken warning; she trusted not in Yahweh nor took refuge with her god. Her princes within her are as roaring lions; her judges as wolves ravening at even, and leaving nothing for the morning; her prophets are vile and deceitful; her priests desecrate that which is holy and despise the Law. Yahweh is righteous in her midst; he does only what is just. Every morning he brings his justice to light and never fails. But the evildoer is past all shame." It could not be but that Yahweh would chastise them fearfully. "Wait, then!" cries the prophet.³ "Thus saith Yahweh: My sentence is to collect the heathen and draw the kingdoms together, to pour out my anger upon you and show you my burning wrath." But all these fearful judgments were destined to compel the heathen to serve Yahweh "with united shoulder," that is, unanimously. Then the proud ones shall be taken away, and a people shall be left, poor and wretched, but resting upon Yahweh's name. The remnant of Israel shall do no wickedness

¹ Zephaniah i. 15-18.

² Zephaniah iii. 1-5.

³ Zephaniah iii. 8 ff.

and speak no falsehood. Then they shall lie down as peacefully as cattle chewing the cud, and none shall make them afraid. "Rejoice, O daughter of Sion! shout for joy, O Israel! Be glad with all your heart and leap for joy, O daughter of Jerusalem! Yahweh has removed your sentence and chased away your foe. Yahweh, the king of Israel, is in the midst of thee, and thou shalt have no more misery. Then shall they say to Jerusalem: Fear not, O Sion; let not thy hands be slack; Yahweh is in thy midst, a mighty one to deliver thee. I will preserve thy tottering ones, and bring back thy exiles, and make thee the marvel of all nations."

The triumphant glow of the conclusion follows strangely upon all these gloomy predictions; and we can hardly help asking whether the prophet accurately reproduced what he had said when he committed his oracles to writing. In any case, however, Zephaniah, in spite of all his indignation against the sins of Judah, and his firm conviction that Yahweh would not leave them unpunished, yet cherished an unshaken faith that Judah would never be destroyed, and that Israel's god would be honoured at last by all the heathen.

We have just expressed a doubt as to whether the written versions of the prophets' discourses always agreed with what they had actually said. We can justify this doubt by an appeal to the history of the oracles of one of the greatest men that Judah ever produced,—the prophet Jeremiah. His fortunes are so closely interwoven with those of his people, and his prophecies are so rich a source of information concerning the times in which he lived, that we cannot record the history of the last half century of Judah's existence without constantly referring to him. We shall therefore presently know more of him, but just now we have chiefly to do with the history of a portion of his oracles.

Our knowledge of this history by no means increases our

confidence in the accuracy with which he has passed down his utterances to us; for it was not till three and twenty years after the beginning of his prophetic activity that he committed the substance of his preaching to writing, in order that it might be read aloud. The roll of his prophecies was afterwards completely burned, upon which he wrote them down again;¹ but of course the best memory in the world would not enable a man to reproduce the very words that he had uttered upon all manner of occasions during nearly a quarter of a century. Altered circumstances, views, and feelings could not but make the prophet colour the distant past afresh, and involuntarily bring it into closer harmony with the requirements of the public he had in view, not when he uttered, but when he recorded his oracles. Thus it happens that we cannot say for certain whether he referred to the Scythians or the Chaldæans when he threatened his people with an enemy from the North. When he wrote, he was doubtless thinking of the Chaldæans, but in the reign of Josiah, when he spoke, this people was almost if not quite unknown in Palestine; and Jeremiah can hardly have referred to any other power than that of the Scythians.

The greater part of the first twelve chapters of his book probably dates, in substance, from the times of Josiah. We could almost guess its contents from what we have already seen of the works of other prophets, for there is great uniformity in the conceptions of the men of God of the eighth and seventh centuries. The judgment which must come upon the people's dreadful sins occupies the foreground; and in the background there is always a joyous future in which the people shall return to Yahweh and enjoy prosperity. Upon this picture of bliss a stronger or fainter light is thrown, according to whether the prophet thinks a greater or smaller portion of the punishment has been inflicted already.

¹ Jeremiah xxxvi. Compare v. 1 with xxv. 3. See also xxxvi. 32.

Jeremiah, however, is distinguished from almost all his colleagues by his lofty conception of Yahweh's moral demands and his intense indignation with the people's sins, which compelled him to appear for the most part as a preacher of repentance.

This impression is strikingly reproduced in the account he gives of his own call to the prophetic office:¹ "The word of Yahweh came to me: 'Before I had formed you in your mother's womb I knew you; before you were born I had sanctified you, and appointed you as a prophet over the heathen.' Then I said, 'Alas, lord Yahweh! I cannot speak, for I am still so young.' But he said to me: 'Say not, I am too young, for you must go whithersoever I send you, and do whatsoever I command you. Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you.' Then Yahweh put forth his hand and touched my mouth and said, 'Behold! I put my words upon your lips; I set you this day over the heathens, and over the kingdoms to pluck up and destroy, to lay waste and to desolate, and also to build up and plant.' And afterwards Yahweh spoke to me again, and asked me what I saw, upon which I answered, 'I see a kettle boiling, and its spout is turned from the North.' Then Yahweh said, 'From the North shall come affliction upon all the dwellers in this land; from the North, at my command, shall many princes come and set their thrones before the gates of Jerusalem, and besiege her walls and all the cities of Judah. Then will I bring judgment on the men of Judah for all their sins, for they have forsaken me and burned incense unto other gods and bowed down before the work of their own hands. Do thou, then, stand up and gird thyself and say to them all that I command. Be not afraid nor tremble before them, for I strengthen you this day like a fortress, like an iron pillar, like a brazen wall, against all the land, against kings and

¹ Jeremiah i. 4—19.

princes, against priests and people. They will contend against you, but will not prevail; for I, Yahweh, am with you to deliver you."

In the case of Jeremiah's call, as in that of Isaiah's,¹ we must bear in mind that the prophet is not giving an exact description of something that took place at a given moment, but the substance of what he could remember of his mental experiences before he had found courage to begin his work as a prophet. This vision of the caldron boiling over is just one of those artificially-constructed productions of which we have already spoken,² and may serve as a proof that Jeremiah is not simply relating his actual experiences. How could he have done so? A man of such deep emotional nature, who made such lofty claims upon himself and others, must doubtless have hesitated long before he became a prophet. Not once, but often, he must have heard the word of Yahweh: "I have chosen you to be a prophet;" not once, but often, he must have answered, "Lord! I am too young!" until at last he could no longer resist the overmastering impulse, and was fully persuaded of Yahweh's mighty support. Nor were there any questions under discussion when he began to preach in which numbers of heathen nations were involved, so that he was not at first what he here describes himself, a prophet for the heathens, though he became one in the second part of his career; and, finally, he must surely have begun his work with brighter expectations, or at least better hopes than we can trace in this account of his call.

But if the story does not faithfully reproduce the prophet's experiences on taking up his office, it exactly reflects the spirit of his work in the interval between the thirteenth³ and seventeenth years of Josiah, as well as afterwards. In spite of his naturally tender and almost over-sensitive disposition, he

¹ See pp. 328, 329.

² See pp. 297 ff.

³ Jeremiah i. 2.

was severe and stern in the extreme, for he looked upon Judah as the nation of apostates. Ah! when Israel was young and served Yahweh in the wilderness, it was a holy people that loved its god, and all they who would injure it were punished; but now Yahweh must ask the Israelites what wrong he had done to their fathers that they should worship idols. They had polluted Canaan, the land of Yahweh. The priests asked not: Where is Yahweh? and the men learned in the law knew him not. The shepherds of the people rebelled against him, and the prophets prophesied through Baal, and indulged in idle dreams. Had such a thing ever been before? No people in the world had ever changed its gods, even though they were but idols! "Be amazed, O heaven! My people has done two evil deeds. They have deserted me, the fountain of living water, and they have hewn out for themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water!"¹ Ashamed, like a thief that is caught, stood the house of Israel, with its kings and princes, priests and prophets, for they said to an image of wood: Thou art my father! and to a god of stone: Thou hast created me! while they turned their backs to Yahweh.² Had not Judah seen how the faithless Israel had practised idolatry upon every high hill and under every green tree, and had not repented though Yahweh exhorted her so often? Yes, she had seen! And had seen, moreover, how Yahweh had rejected his people for its sins, and yet for all that she had not repented, but had likewise become enamoured of the images.³ Dire was the extent of Judah's idolatry; she had as many gods as cities, as many altars as there were streets in Jerusalem;⁴ and the Queen of Heaven was publicly adored to provoke Yahweh's wrath.⁵

The position which Jeremiah occupies, and from which

¹ Jeremiah ii. 1-13.

² Jeremiah ii. 26, 27.

³ Jeremiah iii. 6-10.

⁴ Jeremiah xi. 13.

⁵ Jeremiah vii. 18.

he judges the religious condition of his people, is certainly one-sided. His own words show us that Judah had not really deserted the worship of Yahweh; for when he attacks the immorality of the people, he introduces Yahweh speaking thus:¹ "To what purpose do you bring me incense from Sheba and choicest cinnamon from a distant land? Your burnt offerings please me not; your sacrifices I will not accept." The people, then, did honour Yahweh with incense and sacrifices. Nor did the heathen party ever think of denying that they worshipped the Baals. They could see no manner of harm in it.² Many of them sacrificed their children in the Tophet, but they declared that they did so at the command of their god; and the prophets who opposed the practice were obliged emphatically to proclaim that Yahweh had never enjoined it; nay, that such a thought had not so much as entered his heart.³

What we call the perception of a relative truth, the appreciation of the position of an opponent, was unknown to antiquity. Zephaniah, Jeremiah, and their supporters, believed their own conceptions to be the pure and simple truth, and regarded those of their opponents as downright lies, the fruit of contumacy and godlessness. They could see no difference between the sacrifices to Molech and wanton murder; between the Asherah-worship and common in-chastity. Soothsaying and image-worship were the rejection of Yahweh's service. All was deliberate insubordination. Woe to the sinful people, then! Yahweh would chastise them fearfully.—Of course their opponents paid them back in their own coin, called them sacrilegious blasphemers, and hurled the bitterest reproaches against them in answer to their demand for the abolition of so many religious usages.

No quarter would be asked or given. How long the sup-

¹ Jeremiah vi. 20.

² Jeremiah ii. 23, 35.

³ Jeremiah vii. 31, xix. 5, xxxii. 35.

pressed conflict lasted we cannot tell with any certainty. But this we know, that when it finally burst out, probably on occasion of the approach of the Scythians, the indignation against the heathen practices, which spoke in deeds of violence, must have been long gathering in secret. Before it came to this, however, it had become quite clear that the king would gladly second the efforts of the reformers could he see his way to doing so. He was still hesitating, however, when at last, in the eighteenth year of his reign, the followers of Moses saw that their chance had come to secure his decisive adhesion.

CHAPTER XXXI.

JOSIAH'S REFORMATION.

2 KINGS XXII. 3—XXIII. 25.¹

IT was the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign (626 B.C.). Yahweh's temple at Jerusalem had again fallen into such a condition as to need considerable repair in many portions. The chief priest, Hilkiah, had charge of the necessary work, under the superintendence of Shaphan, one of the king's private secretaries. Now, it happened one day that Hilkiah told this Shaphan that he had made a wonderful discovery in the temple. What he had found was neither more nor less than the book of the Law itself; and he now begged his permission to read it aloud to him. Shaphan listened with intensest interest; and afterwards, when telling the king how the portion of the temple revenues set aside for the repairs had been administered, he also informed him of Hilkiah's discovery. Upon this Josiah asked to have the book read to him. He was deeply moved by its contents, and rent his clothes in grief and terror, to think of the chasm

¹ 2 Chronicles xxxiv. 36—xxxv. 19.

which yawned between the actual religious condition of his people and the demands of Yahweh. Alas! it was only too clear that even the former generations had strayed far from the right path, and that Yahweh's wrath burned with too just a cause. These Scythians must have been sent by him to chastise his rebellious people. But what was to be done? Josiah hastily summoned his principal ministers, and soon commissioned five of them, Hilkiah, Shaphan, and three others, to consult Yahweh on behalf of the king and the people. His emissaries went to a certain Huldah, whose husband, Shallum, was "keeper of the wardrobe;" but whether this office was connected with the temple or with the palace we do not know. Huldah was famed as a prophetess, and it was in that capacity that she was now consulted. Her exact answer has not been preserved. The books of Kings and Chronicles make her utter a fearful threat, in which she predicts that Yahweh's wrath will inevitably burst upon the holy city; but, at the same time, promises that Josiah himself shall die in peace, because he has humbled himself. Were this all that she had said, her response would have been most disheartening. Undoubtedly she really urged the king, in Yahweh's name, to carry out the religious reformation demanded by the newly-discovered book of the Law.

At any rate Josiah immediately set about this task. The nobles, priests, and prophets of Judah, all her most influential citizens, who might be regarded as representing the whole people, were summoned to an assembly in the court of the temple. The book was read to them in the hearing of a crowd of bystanders, and they were told of the king's determination to reform the religion of the country in the spirit of this code of laws. The nobles received the intimation with shouts of approval. Many of them were genuinely devoted to the principles of the Mosaic school, and those who

felt otherwise either held their peace or were at once overwhelmed by the rest. Countless sacrifices sealed the covenant which the king now made with Yahweh, in his people's name, to root out idolatry, image-worship, witchcraft, and every heathenish practice, and to serve Yahweh alone, according to the law of Moses.

It was no light matter thus to reform the religion of Judah. It involved nothing short of a complete revolution. Of course, it could not be expected that everyone would fall in with the new movement heartily, nor did anyone dream of endeavouring to convince those who were opposed to it. The only idea was to carry out the reformation with the high hand of royal might.

The purification naturally began with the temple; and here the king found a strenuous ally in the priest Hilkiah. All the sacrificial instruments and consecrated gifts of Baal and Asherah, together with everything connected with the worship of the heavenly bodies, were carried out of Jerusalem to the heaps of refuse in the valley of the Kidron, where they were broken to pieces, burned with fire, and the ashes scattered to the winds.¹ The great *asherah* was also burned, and its ashes thrown over dead men's graves, to pollute it for ever. All the apparatus in the temple connected with the Asherah-worship, or the honours paid to the Sun-god, was destroyed. The reformation did not stop at Jerusalem. Armed bands, with raging priests and prophets at their head, swept, at the king's command, through every quarter of Judah, from Gibeah to Beersheba. All the *bamahs* they could find they overthrew and polluted. The same lot fell upon the Tophet, and the sanctuaries of Astarte, Chemosh, and Milcom, which had stood ever since the days of Solomon upon a hill opposite Jerusalem.² *Massebahs* and *asherahs* were smitten to pieces, and dead men's bones were

¹ After an amended version.

² Compare p. 94.

scattered over the sacred enclosures, to pollute them and make them unfit for religious purposes for ever.

The priests of these forbidden places of worship were treated in no gentle spirit ; but a distinction was drawn between Levites and others. The former were allowed to present themselves at Jerusalem, where they were not admitted to any of the duties of the temple, but were nevertheless provided for.

At the head of the chief force that passed through the land to destroy every vestige of heathen practices was the king himself. When Judah had been sufficiently purified, he entered the former territory of Judah. Who was to prevent him ? The Assyrian governor, if there still was one, had certainly no spare troops under his command, and could not look to Nineveh for help. The scattered population, half composed of Israelites and half of foreigners who had been transplanted there,¹ was in no position to resist an army of any considerable power. Moreover, many an Israelite was doubtless in hearty sympathy with the Mosaic party in Judah, and was ready to give Josiah a joyful welcome. The king first turned his zeal upon Bethel, where stood the sanctuary of Jeroboam, detested by all good Judæans. He burned and broke the altar, the *bamah*, and the *asherah*, and over the spot on which they had stood he scattered dead men's bones from the graves hard by. One tomb alone he left unviolated. It was that known in the neighbourhood as "the grave of the prophet of Judah."² When Bethel was thus cleansed the *bamahs* of many more Ephraimite cities, which the kings of Israel had set up, were destroyed. And when any of the priests that had officiated at them fell into Josiah's hands, provided they were not Levites,³ he put them to death and burned their bodies on the altars.

Having thus executed the command of Yahweh the king

¹ See p. 396.

² Compare pp. 138—140.

³ Compare p. 137.

returned to Jerusalem, where he made arrangements for a solemn and universal celebration of the Passover. The writer of Kings expressly states that such a Passover had never been celebrated throughout the days of the Judges and the Kings, in contradiction to the Chronicler, who makes Hezekiah hold a Passover in accordance with the regulations of the Law. The writer of Kings himself evidently supposed that the feast had been regularly celebrated before the time of the Judges, that is to say in the wilderness and in the days of Joshua; but we have already seen that this was not really the case, and have discussed the probable origin and meaning of the Passover.¹

After all these steps had been taken, the king had still to keep a tight hand upon the religious customs of the people. There were many Canaanite practices common in Judah which could not be destroyed at a single blow, like idolatrous altars, anointed stones, or *bamahs*. It was exceedingly difficult, for instance, to take any effective measures against the practice of witchcraft and magic, or against the numerous popular customs of heathen origin, such as gashing the face in sign of mourning. In such points as these Josiah was never quite successful; but his zeal for the principles of the Mosaic school never flagged; he did all that in him lay to compel his people to worship Yahweh in accordance with the precepts of the book of law discovered by Hilkiah; and though he was unable thoroughly to carry out his wishes in some respects, though the Mosaic school itself was afterwards compelled to modify its demands in many particulars, yet the heathen party never regained the ascendant. Hilkiah's book of law became the rule of faith and conduct for after generations, and the victory which the Mosaic principles gained under king Josiah was never followed by a defeat.

¹ Vol. II., pp. 47-49.

We need not stay to prove that the discovery of the book of law, which produced so profound an impression, was the occasion rather than the cause of the reformation. It simply put an end to the king's hesitation, and compelled him to take the great, decisive step which would certainly have cost him his throne and his life had the heathen party proved too strong for him. But although the book, taken alone, did not exercise so great an influence as appears at a first superficial glance, yet we cannot help asking, with extreme interest, what it really was and how it came into the temple. These questions we can for the most part answer with sufficient certainty.

In the first place, Hilkiah's book of the law may still be found in our Deuteronomy. The similarity between the precepts of this book and the measures taken by Josiah is so striking as to exclude every other supposition. But it does not follow that the whole of the present book of Deuteronomy existed then ; for it is evidently made up of several distinct portions, and both the beginning and the end are later additions. We may, therefore, take Deuteronomy iv. 45—xxvi. and xxviii.—xxix. 1 as the book found by Hilkiah. Even in these chapters there are many laws which have little or no connection with the great principles of Josiah's reformation ; and since we have no means of fixing the precise date of their origin, it is quite possible that some of them also, as well as the opening and closing chapters of the book, are later additions. Indeed, this is not only possible, but almost certain, if we are to believe the statement that the whole of Hilkiah's book was read straight through to the people assembled in the court of the temple. It can hardly have been a work of two and twenty chapters ! But all this is of comparatively little consequence ; for in any case these additions do not affect the general purpose of the book.

But how did it get into the temple ? That is more than

anyone can say. Most likely it was written by Hilkiah himself, or by some friend of his, and with his assistance. Deuteronomy shows a marked similarity in style and diction to the oracles of Jeremiah, who was, perhaps, the son of this very Hilkiah. If the chief priest or his son really wrote the book, then the assertion of the former, that he had "found" it, was what is called a "pious fraud," that is to say, a lie told for the glory of God, and alas ! it is not the last lie that has been told for that purpose. If we cannot bring ourselves to attribute so dishonourable an action to Hilkiah, we may suppose that the book was composed by some one else of kindred spirit, and placed in the temple by its author without the knowledge of the priest. In that case, the discovery may have been as great a surprise to Hilkiah as to anyone else, and the only "pious fraud" would be that of the unknown author.

Be this as it may, the book was certainly written about the time of its discovery. It is true that it introduces Moses as uttering the precepts and exhortations of which it consists, just before the people enter Canaan. But this is no more than a literary fiction. The position of affairs assumed throughout the book is that of Judah, in the time of Josiah, and the forms of idolatry it denounces are those practised by Manasseh. Before his time the book of Deuteronomy would have been unintelligible. In Josiah's reign it exactly expressed the demands of the Mosaic school.

It is easy to understand why the author of Deuteronomy, instead of writing in his own name, put the views he wished to enforce into the mouth of Moses. In ancient times no man of deep religious feeling would think of taking any important step without the command of the deity, who revealed his will, it was supposed, in the directest possible manner, by means of his emissaries.¹ All the knowledge of

¹ Compare Vol. II., pp. 77 ff.

God which Yahweh's worshippers possessed rested, according to their own conception, upon the external authority of communications they had received from him, and not at all upon what their own hearts and minds approved. Now these revelations might be made to the prophets, and in northern Israel it was they who actually fought the battle for the purity of Yahweh's worship. Hosea, for instance, condemned the worship of the images of bulls. But in Judah the prophets were not so powerful or independent as they were in Israel. For the most part they followed the lead of the priests, who in their turn professed to derive all their wisdom from Moses. The story of Moses punishing the Israelites for worshipping an image had played an important part in the first attempt at a reformation, under Hezekiah;¹ and now the great founder of Israel's religion must be brought upon the scene again to admonish a later generation. The priests felt themselves to be the true followers of Moses; they were convinced that all their teaching was exactly what he had wished and intended, and this seemed to give them a perfect right to speak in his name.

We must now give a short summary of the contents of the book in order to gain a just conception of the views entertained by the Mosaic school that rose to power in Judah under King Josiah.

When Israel, says the book of Deuteronomy, was on the point of crossing the Jordan, Moses determined to impress upon his people once more the commandments of their god. So he began by reminding them of all that had taken place at Horeb; how Yahweh had made known the Ten Commandments to them there, and how deadly terror had seized them at the aspect of the mountain. As soon as they came into the land of the Canaanites, then, they must be sure, above all things, to destroy the sacred objects of the peoples dwelling

¹ See pp. 347 ff.

there—their altars, their *massebahs*, their *asherahs*, and their images—and not to serve their gods. With no less earnestness does Moses warn them against the worship of images, which was so closely connected with the service of other gods. To impress this upon them he reminds them of Yahweh's wrath when they worshipped the golden bull. Another point of distinction between the Israelites and the Canaanites was that the former were not to offer sacrifices to their god in any place that happened to be convenient, but only at the sanctuary in the city "which Yahweh should choose." Idolatry must be punished with death. Even if a man who enticed them to idolatry performed miracles to prove his divine mission, still he must be put to death. His nearest relatives must not spare him. If a whole city became guilty of idolatry it must be laid under the ban. Levi was separated from the rest, henceforth to be the priestly tribe. The Levites were to have no inheritance with the others, but were to live upon the proceeds of the altar, that is to say, upon the portion of the sacrifices that was due to them, and the firstlings. The Israelites were also urged to invite destitute Levites to a share in their tithes and freewill offerings. All kinds of witchcraft were sternly forbidden. To find out Yahweh's will Israel must go to the prophets whom he would send; and if a prophet foretold anything that did not come to pass, it would show that he was a false prophet, and he must be stoned to death.

Such are the great leading principles of Deuteronomy: Idolatry, image-worship, and witchcraft must be utterly abolished; there is but one priestly tribe—the tribe of Levi; there is but one lawful place of worship. To these points the lawgiver returns again and again. But we also find a number of other precepts in his book, some of them very short, and some of them worked out at length. For instance, he forbids the Israelites to mutilate themselves in time of

mourning, or to eat unclean animals or carrion; and he commands them to cancel all debts once in seven years, on the sabbath year, and also to release any Hebrew slave who has served six years, in case he wishes it. The book also contains regulations concerning the three great feasts, the administration of justice,¹ the duty of kings,² the cities of refuge (to which we shall return presently), the customs of war, the measures to be taken if a dead body should be discovered anywhere, the inalienable right of primogeniture, the way in which a son who obstinately disobeys either of his parents is to be dealt with, the punishment of in chastity, the inviolability of a vow to Yahweh, and much more besides.

It deserves remark that the limitation of lawful worship to a single place sometimes compels the lawgiver to cancel older laws. For instance, there was an ordinance that every Israelite who slaughtered a beast must do it at the neighbouring sanctuary, with the assistance of the priest, otherwise he would be held guilty of bloodshed. This law was intended to put some check upon various idolatrous practices, and was perhaps issued in Hezekiah's time, though it is now embedded in a much later law.³ Now if there was only to be one sanctuary in the whole country, it would be utterly impossible to carry out this regulation, and accordingly the Deuteronomist declares that the Israelites may slaughter and eat their beasts wherever they like, as long as they do not eat the blood; but that they must take their first-fruits, their firstlings, their tithes, their votive and other offerings to the one sanctuary of the land.⁴ If they lived too far away from it, they might sell their gifts and buy offerings with the proceeds in the chosen city.⁵

The older law ordained that places of refuge should be

¹ See p. 237.

² See p. 108.

³ Leviticus xvii. 3 ff.

⁴ Deuteronomy xii. 13—27.

⁵ Deuteronomy xiv. 22—26.

instituted everywhere, to which anyone who had accidentally killed a man might flee for safety. It was taken for granted that the place of refuge would usually be an altar.¹ But when it was ordained that only one altar should exist in the whole country, it became necessary to make some new arrangement. Accordingly, the Deuteronomist fixes upon three cities of refuge, in various districts of the land, in which anyone who has accidentally taken his neighbour's life may dwell in safety. In case Israel's territory should extend, three more are to be added to the number.²

In reading through the book of Deuteronomy we are struck by the tone of glowing earnestness and fervour in which the writer announces Yahweh's laws to the people. The legislation of antiquity had generally something of a hortatory character,³ and this is eminently true of Deuteronomy. It is as if a father were instructing his children, sometimes with great severity, but always with deep affection. However fearful the threats he utters from time to time, he always means them as an exhortation to obedience to Yahweh, that the blessings of obedience may follow. He by no means thinks that a mechanical observance of God's commandments will suffice. Israel must be a holy people, must fear his god, and, what is more, must love him with all the heart.⁴ In many respects the writer takes an exalted moral attitude. It is true that he repeatedly urges the Israelites to lay the Canaanites and all other idolaters under the ban; but in this connection it is only fair to remember that when he wrote there were no Canaanite cities in existence, so that in this respect, at any rate, his injunctions cannot have been intended to be actually put into execution. Nevertheless, we must admit that he distinctly enjoins a massacre to the glory of God, and would call in the sword to

¹ Exodus xxi. 13, 14. ² Deuteronomy xix. 1-13. ³ See p. 242.

⁴ Deuteronomy vi. 5, and elsewhere.

back the truth. This is a mischievous and dangerous mistake, but we must not forget that it was universal in antiquity, that the Christians themselves fell into it for whole centuries, and that many of them cherish it even now. We could not expect the Deuteronomist, then, to join love for the idolaters with hatred of idolatry, or to apply the law of kindness to the treatment of such transgressors.

To understand the writer's deep and earnest moral feeling, we must dwell upon such precepts as these: "If you give your slave his liberty after six years' service, you must not let him go away empty handed;"¹ "If you wish to marry a captive woman, you must first allow her time to mourn for the relatives she has lost, and must never afterwards sell her as a slave;"² "If you find a nest with a bird and eggs or young ones in it, you may take the eggs or young ones, but not the mother;"³ "You must not make your countrymen pay interest on the money you lend them, but you may take interest from foreigners;"⁴ "If you find your brother's ox or sheep straying, see that he gets it back again;"⁵ "Never take a man's upper or nether millstone in pledge; and if you take a pledge from anyone, do not go into his house for it; and if the pledge is some necessary garment, take it back to him before nightfall;"⁶ "Never oppress the poor, the labourer, or the stranger, nor keep his wages till the day after he has earned them;"⁷ "Leave good gleanings in your field and orchard for the poor, remembering that you were once oppressed yourselves in Egypt;"⁸ "Remember the day of rest, for your servants must rest on it;"⁹ "Fathers must not be put to death for their children's crimes, nor children for

¹ Deuteronomy xv. 13, 14.² Deuteronomy xxi. 10—14.³ Deuteronomy xxii. 6.⁴ Deuteronomy xxiii. 19, 20.⁵ Deuteronomy xxii. 1—4.⁶ Deuteronomy xxiv. 6, 10—13, 17.⁷ Deuteronomy xxiv. 14, 15.⁸ Deuteronomy xxiv. 19—22.⁹ Deuteronomy v. 12—15.

their fathers';"¹ "You must not muzzle an ox as it treads out the corn;"² "You must not give up a slave who has escaped;"³ "When a man is sentenced to be scourged, you must not lay more than forty lashes upon him."⁴—Truly, when we consider the times in which the code was drawn up, it seems difficult to go too far in admiration of its fine spirit of humanity.

So at last the Mosaic school triumphed for good in Judah. It had had a long struggle for victory, and had often seemed in danger of destruction.

Its triumph under Josiah brings us to a pause in the history of Israel's religion, for henceforth, although heathendom may raise its head from time to time in Judah, it is always easy to put it down. Henceforth Hilkiah's book of law furnishes the people of Yahweh with a firm foundation upon which to rear the edifice of its religion.

In the interests of humanity, can we hail this triumph of the Mosaic school with joy? Undoubtedly we can. When we contemplate the strife in which it was engaged, we can definitely declare in its favour and against its adversary. When the conflict first began there was still room for hesitation, for we saw that in Solomon's reign the heathen party was that of industrial and artistic progress, and that their narrow-minded adversaries were not so very much above them even in their conception of the attributes of God. But now that the two tendencies have gradually developed the principles that guide them, now that we see clearly where heathendom would have landed Israel, and how Mosaism raised it to ever loftier conceptions of Yahweh and purer principles of morality, now we can rejoice with all our hearts to see the

¹ Deuteronomy xxiv. 16. Compare pp. 230, 231.

² Deuteronomy xxv. 4.

³ Deuteronomy xxiii. 15, 16. ⁴ Deuteronomy xxv. 1—3.

scale inclining as it does. The moral worship of Yahweh has triumphed, and, though it has still many defects, we have good grounds for hope that it will gradually purify itself from all its stains.

But, after all, our satisfaction is far from complete. We cannot sympathise with the way in which the Mosaic party gained its victory. It was force which brought the worship of the Judæans into agreement with the Mosaic programme, and Hilkiah's book of law was introduced and maintained by royal decree. It is true that we can hardly find fault with this. The principle was recognised by all parties alike that the sword was the natural arbiter in such affairs. But a violent solution is fraught with danger to the victors. They had suppressed opposition by force; would not they themselves in their turn become slaves of their own law? The Deuteronomist makes Moses explicitly declare, with reference to the prohibition of all sacrifices elsewhere than at Jerusalem, "Henceforth you shall not do, as we have done hitherto, each one as he thinks best."¹ The Judæans, then, were laid under such restrictions as made religious freedom henceforth impossible. No sacrifices might be offered except at Jerusalem, nor even there except under the supervision of the Levitical priests and in accordance with the precepts of the Law. Even in civil affairs complicated questions must be referred by the tribunal before which they came to the supreme court at Jerusalem, in which the chief priests, amongst others, had a seat.² What dangers have we here for the religious and social life of Israel! When priests reign supreme it is all over with freedom, with genuine religious life, and at last with morality itself. Was it likely that the Levites of the temple of Jerusalem, henceforth the only lawful priests, would allow the worshippers of Yahweh any freedom? Would they tolerate the prophets—those men of

¹ Deuteronomy xii. 8.

² See p. 237.

the spirit? Would they not rather suppress with growing rigour every free expression of thought or feeling, carry their Law into ever more and more frivolous detail, and foster the spirit of formalism?

Alas! these questions admit of but one answer. Those who had put down idolatry with the sword would not shrink from appealing to force against anything they deemed inconsistent with the purity of the worship of Yahweh as by law established. And if this be so, alas for Israel! for its religion must degenerate into formalism. The special strength and glory of the Mosaic school had always been the intimate connection which it established and maintained between religion and morality; but this very strength exposed it to the fatal risk of subjecting the spiritual life to the same external system of commandments and prohibitions which regulate public morality, and treating forms of worship and speculative opinions as equal in importance to moral purity and earnestness. The mischief is contained in germ even in the Ten Commandments, which lay equal stress upon the precepts of morality, the observance of the sabbath, and the prohibition to serve other gods or worship images. This germ was but slightly developed in the most ancient Israelitish code,¹ but in that which underlay Hezekiah's reformation it was much more prominent,² and its consequences came out far more clearly yet in the book of Deuteronomy. Here the noblest moral precepts stand side by side with the most trivial regulations as to forms of worship, and the same binding power is conferred upon them both. We shall see hereafter with what fatal vigour this spirit of formalism spread and grew.

Not long after the promulgation of Hilkiah's book of law, a certain Judæan furnished it with an introduction and an appendix, in which these words occur :³ "The command-

¹ See pp. 237 ff.

² See p. 360.

³ Deuteronomy xxx. 11—14.

ment which I command you this day is not hidden from you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven that you need say: Who shall climb up to heaven for us, and bring it down for us, that we may hear it and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea that you need say: Who shall go over for us, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it? For it is very near to you; you take it upon your lips, and can repeat it by heart." Here we find the fatal theory of the Law, the worship of the letter, introduced! In course of time this principle will petrify the soul of Israel, and choke its moral life.

All this we shall see. But, as a good principle only reveals its sanctifying power little by little, and at first gives small sign of it, if any, so an evil principle may long conceal its fatal consequences. In the centuries which followed the introduction of the Law, Israel still enjoyed the fruits of the prophetic spirit, and gave many a proof of sacred inspiration, of a faith that sweeps everything before it, and of the true piety of the heart; but while after generations were thus sustained by what their fathers had prepared for them, the deadly poison of formalism was ever sinking deeper and yet deeper, and preparing a woeful end for Israel's religion.

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ERRATUM.

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